# gamesTM

PS3 | 360 | Wii | PS2 | GC | Xbox | PC | GBA | PSP | DS | Arcade | Retro

PREVIEWED
## DEVIL MAY CRY 4
Dante's next-gen awakening

SPECIAL 50TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

INTERVIEW
## PETER MOLYNEUX
On Lionhead, Microsoft, ambition and mistakes

# THE LEGEND OF NIINTENDO
A LINK TO THE PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE

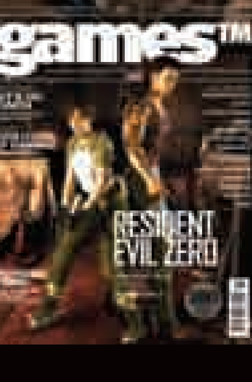
HIGHLIGHTS
METAL GEAR SOLID 4 [PS3] TGS 2006 [FEATURE] HALO WARS [360] FABLE 2 [360] SWOS [360] FORZA 2 [360] XO6 [FEATURE] GUITAR HERO II [MULTI] ALAN WAKE [MULTI] SUPREME COMMANDER [PC] BLUE DRAGON [360] PGR 4 [360] BATTLEFIELD 2142 [PC]


eMag

You may have noticed the bright and shiny rainbow foil on the front of our 50th issue cover this month. Yes, that's right, we're 50 issues old. Happy birthday us. Yay. So how did we spend our time this month? Playing on Nintendo Wii? Sure – *Wii Sports* is superb. Blasting our way through next-gen games on 360 and PS3? Yep, on both counts (Sony kindly brought down a PS3 for us to play on – hurrah). Producing the magazine? Naturally. But all of these pale in comparison to the two biggest things to hit the **games™** office this month, namely, *42 All-Time Classics* on Nintendo DS, and the phrase "Shit got f***ed up", which we discovered can be used to answer almost any problem. For example, PS3 is delayed in Europe: "Shit got f***ed up." I've put numerous swear words in my editorial this month: "Shit got…", well, you get the idea. But remember, kids, it's neither big nor clever to swear. Funny, yes, but not clever. Moving swifty back to that DS multi-player sensation, our lunchtime sessions of *Pro Evo* have fallen foul to the most fun you can have with you clothes on: darts and bowling. The game has proven so popular that anyone on the team who didn't already have one went out and bought themself a DS. So the moral of the story is if you don't have a DS and *42 All-Time Classics*, then shit got f***ed up. Enjoy the issue…

**Paul Morgan**
**Editor**















## 28 NOV 2002

games™'s humble beginnings began with the release of *Splinter Cell*. Three sequels on and we're still going strong.











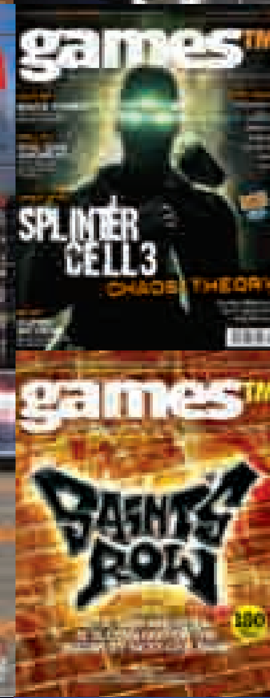












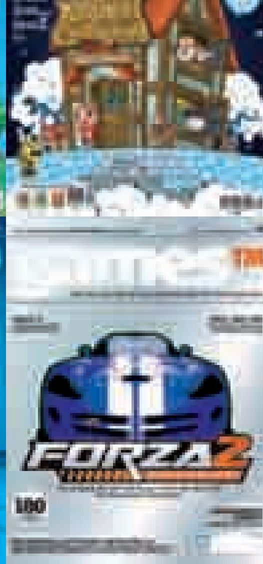






































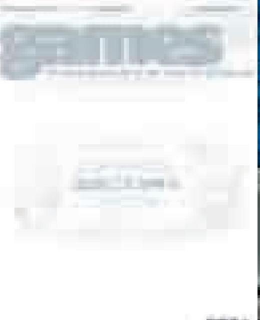



















**2 NOV 2006**
Four years and two awards later and games™ leads you into the next/new generaton of gaming. Thank you, everyone, for your support over the years.






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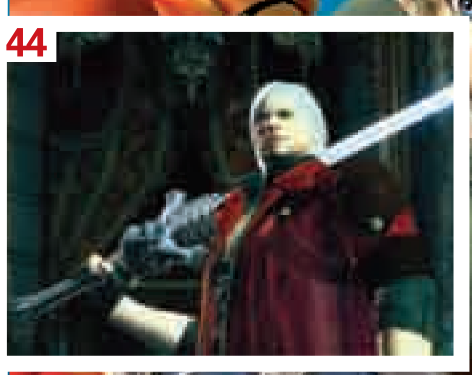


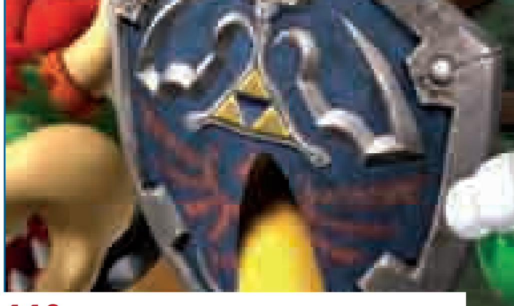
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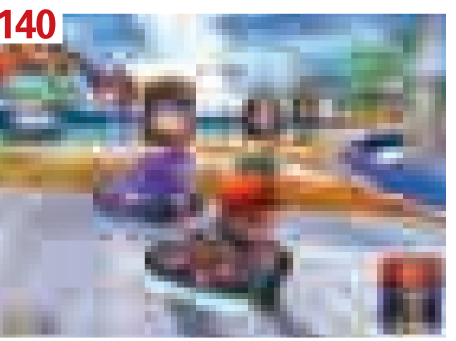
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SUBSCRIBE NOW and save 30%
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Nintendo
A link to the past, present and future of the legendary publisher

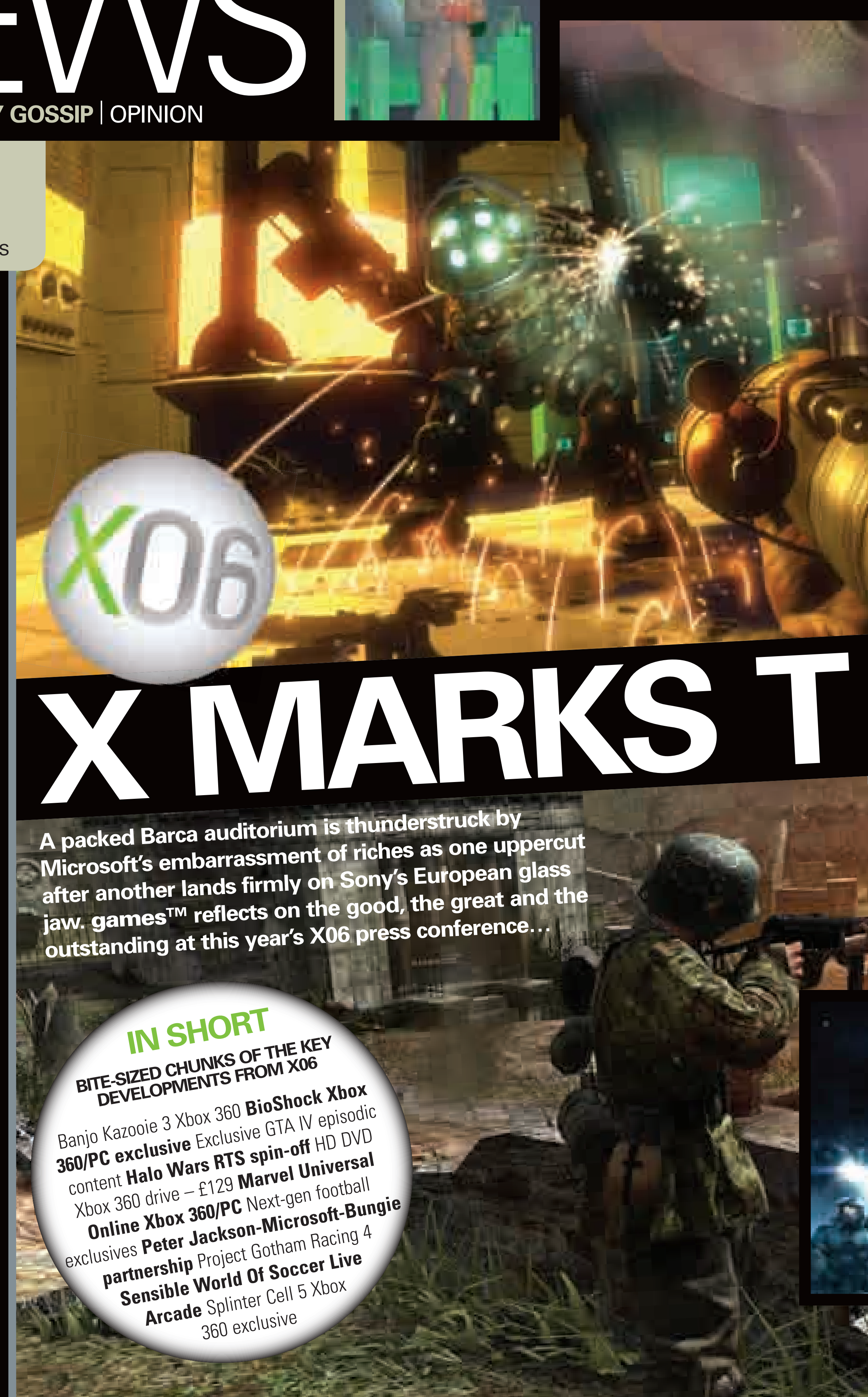
# NEWS

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FIND OUT WHERE TO GET THE ESSENTIAL STORIES WITH OUR QUICK GUIDE TO THE NEWS






# X MARKS T

**A packed Barca auditorium is thunderstruck by Microsoft's embarrassment of riches as one uppercut after another lands firmly on Sony's European glass jaw. games™ reflects on the good, the great and the outstanding at this year's X06 press conference…**

## IN SHORT

**BITE-SIZED CHUNKS OF THE KEY DEVELOPMENTS FROM X06**

Banjo Kazooie 3 Xbox 360 **BioShock Xbox 360/PC exclusive** Exclusive GTA IV episodic content **Halo Wars RTS spin-off** HD DVD Xbox 360 drive – £129 **Marvel Universal Online Xbox 360/PC** Next-gen football exclusives **Peter Jackson-Microsoft-Bungie partnership** Project Gotham Racing 4 **Sensible World Of Soccer Live Arcade** Splinter Cell 5 Xbox 360 exclusive

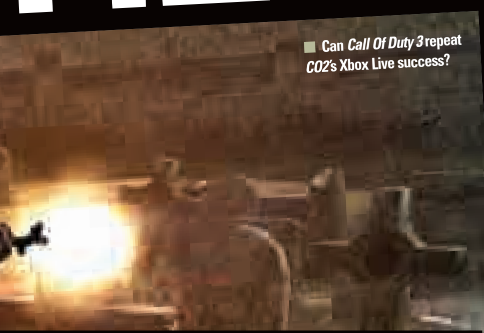
X06 was held in sunny Barcelona.

BioShock… looking even more incredible.

As a multiformat magazine you're expected to air your thoughts on the next-generation formats objectively. But as Sony continues to snub Europe while Microsoft pampers to us and Nintendo saunters quietly by (albeit stylishly and innovatively), it's difficult not to favour the organisation that's feeding the consumer with an all-you-can-eat buffet of next-gen delights rather than starving it to feed its preferred patrons.

That was the feeling from X06, where Peter Moore and Chris Lewis signalled Microsoft's driven ambition for its second-generation line-up of Xbox 360 titles and Games For Windows campaign, providing

# HE SPOT



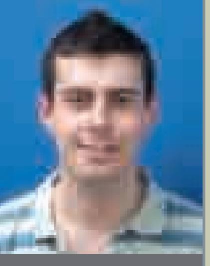
Can *Call Of Duty 3* repeat *CO2*'s Xbox Live success?



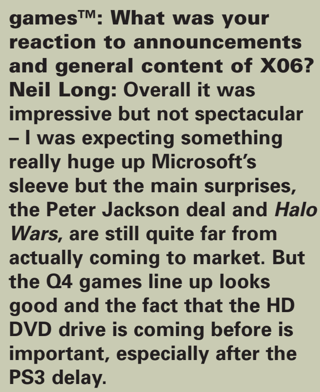
*Halo Wars* expands the universe in this RTS offshoot.

an appetite of Mr Creosote proportions. "As we prepare to launch some of our biggest global titles and best regional content both right now and well into the future, consumers will have much to choose from with a system designed for high-definition and online entertainment. We are the only next-generation experience that seamlessly connects players to their games, friends and entertainment content," was Lewis' message to an auditorium hanging on his every word. But rather than rely on third-party sources to provide the heavyweight line-up, Microsoft Game Studios is at the forefront of console and PC development with titles such as *Alan Wake, Fable 2, Project Gotham Racing 4, Blue Dragon, Forza Motorsport 2* and Rare's all-new *Banjo Kazooie* outing expected to lead the charge against those produced within the stuttering stables of Sony.

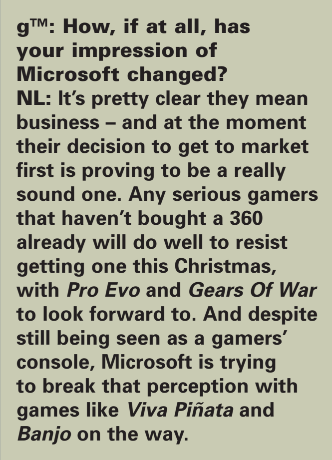
THE FORMAT OF the conference was in a similar vein to that of E3, with regional vice president for home and entertainment division EMEA Chris Lewis taking the lead and leaving the industrious Peter Moore to make fleeting appearances to hammer the message home. The message was clear:



Neil Long gives his opinion on Microsoft's 2006 press conference.



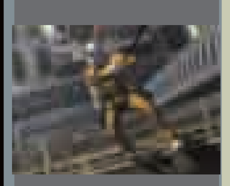
A brand new 360 outing for Rare's *Banjo Kazooie*.



*Project Gotham Racing* will return in 2007.



The wait is almost over for Ubisoft's *Rainbow Six Vegas*.



IO Interactive's *Kane & Lynch* was on display at X06.

## INDUSTRY OPINION

### WE ASKED NEIL LONG, DEPUTY EDITOR OF INDUSTRY INSIDER JOURNAL MCV HIS THOUGHTS ON X06…

**games™: What was your reaction to announcements and general content of X06?**
**Neil Long:** Overall it was impressive but not spectacular – I was expecting something really huge up Microsoft's sleeve but the main surprises, the Peter Jackson deal and *Halo Wars*, are still quite far from actually coming to market. But the Q4 games line up looks good and the fact that the HD DVD drive is coming before is important, especially after the PS3 delay.

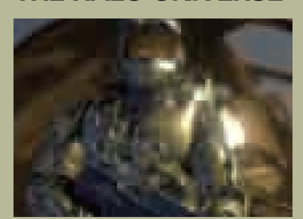
**g™: What impact will this have for Sony?**
**NL:** I don't think it will impact Sony in Europe – and they'll be too busy concentrating on how PSP and PS2 do at Christmas. And there's the small matter of the PS3 launch in March to deal with.

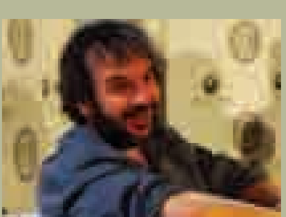
**g™: How, if at all, has your impression of Microsoft changed?**
**NL:** It's pretty clear they mean business – and at the moment their decision to get to market first is proving to be a really sound one. Any serious gamers that haven't bought a 360 already will do well to resist getting one this Christmas, with *Pro Evo* and *Gears Of War* to look forward to. And despite still being seen as a gamers' console, Microsoft is trying to break that perception with games like *Viva Piñata* and *Banjo* on the way.

**g™: Can the Xbox 360 fend off the PS3 in the long run?**
**NL:** It's difficult to say because we've still not seen that much of PS3. If PS3 lives up to Sony's billing, 360 will start to look dated compared to PS3's power in a couple of years, but that's a big if. On the other hand, if PS3 disappoints in terms of power and stays at a high price it will be difficult for Sony to catch up on 360's head start.

# THE HALO EFFECT

## MICROSOFT OUTLAY PLANS TO EXPAND THE HALO UNIVERSE


■ Will *Halo 3* see the end of Master Chief?


■ Peter Jackson will create a new *Halo* game.


■ *Halo Wars* will be the first spin-off to hit 360.

**While Bungie continues the *Halo 3* development fight, Microsoft has been turning it into a franchise assault with *Halo 2* due to hit Windows Vista, Peter Jackson's *Halo* movie scheduled for 2008 and RTS spin-off *Halo Wars* due late 2007 or 2008. Jackson's Wingnut Interactive is also working on a *Halo* game-cross-film that the director believes will create a new genre and herald a new interactive era.**

**Could we be witnessing the beginnings of a *Star Wars*-esque business model? "To be honest, I don't think we've ever thought about it explicitly enough like that," MGS general manager Shane Kim replies. "That possibility exists, and we're very careful with the property… The minute I start talking to you guys about the *Halo* party game, then you can accuse me of over-exploiting the property."**

Microsoft is a far more powerful foe than Sony expected. A short introductory *Banjo Kazooie* teaser from Rare preceded the conference party message which consisted of staggered statistics, kept promises and sly jibes at Sony. Things were neatly woven together with striking demonstrations of *Gears Of War*, *Assassin's Creed* and *Lost Odyssey* – the latter a visually stunning RPG engineered by Japanese developer Hironobu Sakaguchi who is also behind *Blue Dragon* – as Microsoft began its belated attempt to reclaim lost ground on the Japanese market. And after an impressive display at TGS in September, both Sakaguci's RPGs should help Microsoft get a foot in the door, or, at the very least, a big toe.

The words 'exclusive' and 'Xbox 360' were thrown about like confetti at an all-day wedding as clips from *PGR 4* and *Halo Wars* coveted applause, and the news the next *Splinter Cell* would be 360 exclusive surprised many. Lewis kept the punches coming with further information on the 360 exclusive *GTA IV* downloadable content in the form of two episodic downloads with hours of new gameplay akin to the *Half-Life 2* episodic content, while *Resident Evil 5*'s simultaneous next-gen release was relegated to mere mention.

THE BIGGEST SURPRISE came when Peter Moore rolled out cinematic legend Peter Jackson to rapturous applause. Jackson is a part of Microsoft's long list of impressive collaborations, with the veteran film creator teaming up with MGS and Bungie to develop a new addition to the *Halo* franchise. "It's not a game, it's not a film, it's a combination of the two," explained Jackson before acknowledging the need to come up with a name for it at a later date.

"I'm getting bored with films now… a few years ago I remember being a lot more excited about the films that were coming up and now I find myself thinking 'I'll catch that on DVD'. The reality is that I'm more aware and more excited about games that are being released," Jackson revealed. "I'm not even thinking about doing games, because other people do games far, far better than me. I don't have the skills in that area, but what I do love is stories. I don't have to keep delivering these stories as movies until I retire… or get hit by a bus. And I don't particularly want to write books. The interaction on the Xbox is something I enjoy, and I want to play around with something that's a bit different."

THE EVENT ALSO witnessed the declaration that the 360 HD DVD drive will be bundled with Jackson's *King Kong* (for a limited period) and a 360 Universal Media Remote for £129. This price crucially maintains Microsoft's affordability over PS3 while giving gamers the choice of viewing high-definition movies rather than forcing the technology upon them.

If the conference was the appetiser, then the event that followed was the main course with detailed

## Games For Windows



**X06 saw Rich Wickham, director of Microsoft Games For Windows Business, attend the event for the first time as Microsoft sets out to reaffirm Windows as a serious gaming platform. So how will the PC platform develop in 2007?**

"There's a lot of things that we're really trying to do with Windows that we've never really done before. About two years ago, looking at the platform and realising that we weren't doing things right for the games platform, we started to build a strategy that would get us to where I think we are today… It's about trying to create a great gaming platform rather than just a games scenario in Windows.

"Our goal is to replicate all the parts of Xbox Live that make sense on Windows, and then customise it. For example, the interface is going to be slightly different because you have so much more screen real estate on Windows, and that allows you to do some really interesting things. When it comes to downloadable content with causal games… we're absolutely looking at whether those are things that make sense on the platform. I think that you can probably guess that they do, but we haven't built that part of the plan yet. A lot of [the team] used to work within Windows and they are heads down making sure that that service is ready when we ship *Shadowrun* and *Halo 2*."


■ *Alan Wake* could revolutionise the survival-horror genre.

■ *Forza Motorsport 2*… worth the wait.



Hellgate: London appearing soon on a PC near you.

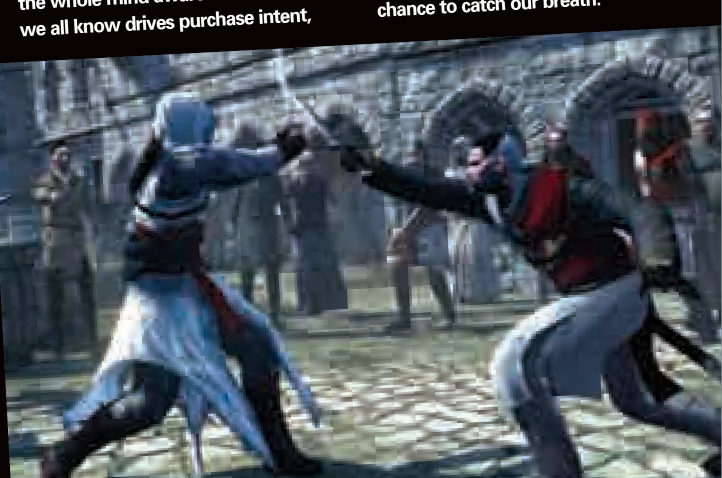
walkthroughs of the flagship titles well into development showcased by the developers themselves, and, in the case of *Fable 2*, by Peter Molyneux. "You've got a lot of people making open-ended simulated worlds and role-playing games where the world reacts to you; we've got to totally do features that completely surprise, shock and amaze people, we can't just do what people expect," Molyneux explained before delving into a 30-minute presentation about how the good versus bad, rich or poor formula will help usher in a new RPG revolution. Microsoft also had *Mass Effect*, *Gears Of War*, *Forza Motorsport 2*, *Alan Wake* and *Viva Piñata* demos running throughout the day, while third-party titles *BioShock*, *Alone In The Dark* and *Kane & Lynch: Dead Men* delighted elsewhere.

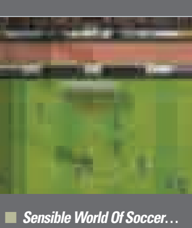
The feeling of the conference was that Microsoft had surpassed itself, with multiple gaming pods, multi-player gaming sessions (including *Splinter Cell*), Live Arcade and hands-on demos of *Portal* and *Half-Life 2*.

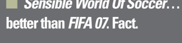
BUT X06 IS just the beginning of an aggressive campaign to conquer new territories and hold ground on those already occupied. "You can't blind people with everything and then go dark for a long time," says Lewis. "You have to be more consistent both in terms of your brand presence to drive the whole mind awareness which we all know drives purchase intent, and you have to do that consistently but also the content delivery has to be consistent, measured, broadly appealing in terms of demographics and there has to be a good rhythmic delivery there. It is in the plan already, and there's a lot more still to come. We did have something of an embarrassment of riches, but there's a hell of a lot more coming. And in many ways, the most exciting developments are still to come," Lewis concluded.

With Sony launching in North America and Japan in a matter of weeks, and Nintendo globally soon after, Microsoft's footing in the next-gen race is sure to be tested. However, given the massive head start in Europe, Microsoft will be feeling confident its second-generation line-up will fend off advances for some time, and with titles like *BioShock*, *Mass Effect* and *Alan Wake* on the horizon, few would argue.

But while the American giant is hard at work expanding the 360 user base to the projected 10 million units by Christmas, Microsoft is already looking beyond the next generation. "Of course, we're constantly thinking about the next thing – we have to," remarks Lewis. "It's my point about complacency – you can't sit back on your laurels in this business, the consumer won't let you, the developers certainly won't let us… You'll see more over time and we're not talking about the next version yet, so give us a chance to catch our breath."







*Sensible World Of Soccer…* better than *FIFA 07*. Fact.

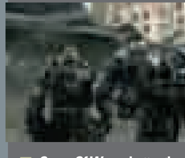


Shane Kim: corporate vice president and jolly nice guy.





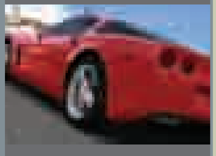
In conversation with Kim, Jackson and Molyneux.



*Gears Of War…* better than sex? Epic's unreal shoot-'em-up.



*Crysis* set to be the best thing to come out of EA in 2007.



Life begins at 180mph in Microsoft's *Forza Motorsport 2*.

# LIVE ARCADE

## THE NEXT BATCH OF XBOX LIVE ARCADE GAMES ANNOUNCED

- Assault Heroes
- Contra
- Defender
- Doom
- Gyruss
- Heavy Weapon: Atomic Tank
- Lumines Live!
- Mutant Storm Empire
- Sensible World Of Soccer
- Small Arms
- Street Trace: NYC
- Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3

# MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS

## AN INTERVIEW WITH MICROSOFT'S SHANE KIM

Microsoft Game Studios general manager Shane Kim had a lot to say about franchises, the importance of new IPs and creating edgy mature-rated titles such as *BioShock*…

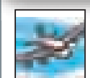
"I don't think you can be in the entertainment business unless you're willing. Now, whether or not Microsoft Game Studios would publish how far we would go… obviously we publish mature-rated titles and *Gears Of War* is not your family title, but there's gonna be subject matter more and more in the future where we're going to approach that edge, and we're going to have to figure out as a publisher, as a company where our comfort zone is too."

Talking about *Halo* and the direction it's taking, Kim had this to say: "Even *Halo* will run its course, and actually that's why *Halo Wars* is a pretty important and interesting thing for us to do, which is to try and expand the property beyond the realm of first-person shooters, and, if lucky, we'll do that right and people will start to think that *Halo Wars* is a natural extension of the *Halo* universe, and maybe we'll have something there. But even *Halo* itself will run its course at some point, now that one has pretty long, long legs, but if you're not creating new properties, eventually – which a lot of people within the industry are facing – you're going to die, you're going to run out of new ideas and you'll increasingly turn to other sources for your creativity and intellectual property and I think that's very dangerous for the industry."

# DATA STREAM

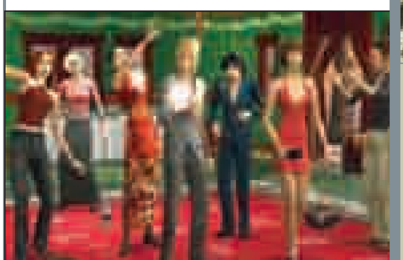
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BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



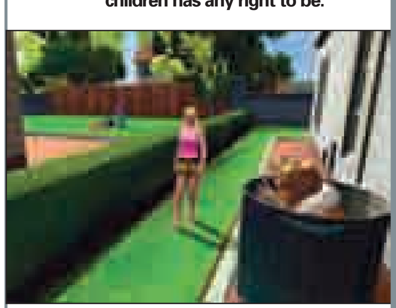
## SIM AIR

**In a move that will delight frequent flying gamers everywhere, Electronic Arts has signed a deal with DTI Software to provide entertainment for its airline partners. As well as a number of titles from the catalogue of Pogo.com, including *Poppit!*, *Word Whomp*, *Phlinx*, *Tri-Peaks Solitaire* and *Harvest Mania*, EA will also be licensing *The Sims* to 62 airlines. We can take or leave the others, but *The Sims* is perfect entertainment to while away a ten-hour flight, and marks a return to those halcyon days when Virgin provided SNES games on transatlantic flights.**



## RETURN OF THE KING

**The fast food industry never misses a chance to peddle its wares to a new audience, but Burger King has taken an unprecedented step and developed three games for Xbox and 360, which will be available to US customers for $3.99. The E-rated games, which will no doubt be of the poorest possible quality, are called *Pocketbike Racer*, *Big Bumpin'* and *Sneak King*, and all involve eating burgers or forcing other people to. Our favourite is *Sneak King*, the screenshots of which look far more sinister than a game for children has any right to be.**





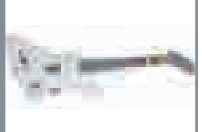
That Xbox 360 can run games like *Assassin's Creed* has led many to question PS3's price.



Sony will be relying heavily on the new adventures of Snake to provide incentive for gamers to buy the console.



MTV has marked out its interest in gaming with several industry buyouts in recent months.



Xbox 360 comes packing an exclusive mini Gibson X-Plorer guitar.



# DISCS TO GO

## SONY BOSS HERALDS THE RISE OF DIGITAL DISTRIBUTION

**Sony allayed fears over the price of PlayStation3 with the assertion that the technology would last for a decade.** Ten years for £500 doesn't seem like such a bad idea, but in keeping with the company's recent schizophrenic behaviour, Jamie McDonald, vice president of Sony Europe, has confused the issue once more.

In an interview with Gamesindustry.biz, McDonald suggested that the vast majority of content would probably be provided digitally within the next five years, thereby rendering the comparatively large storage capacity of Blu-ray technology, if not obsolete, then certainly far less relevant. "In five years' time, it is my belief that the majority of content won't be delivered on disc," McDonald suggests. "That has many implications for developers and the way we organise our industry. It also brings with it great opportunities because it means you can touch your consumer base in many different ways and at different times."

McDonald was quick to point out that the disc wouldn't be totally eradicated; it would serve as a jumping-off point, with the majority of content provided through downloads. With the cost of PlayStation3 largely attributed to the Blu-ray drive, the idea that the disc will merely become a launch pad – something, it can be assumed, that Xbox 360's DVD technology will be perfectly capable of – less than halfway through the console's lifespan is a very mixed message at best. Sony's dance with PR death continues.

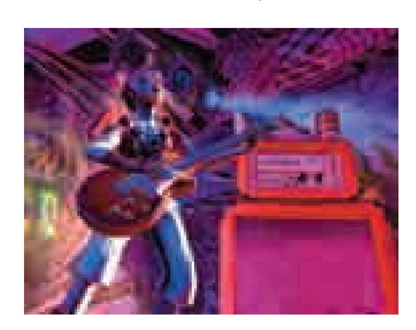
# THE NEW ROCK 'N' ROLL

## MTV CONTINUES ITS MARCH INTO THE WORLD OF GAMING

**With the dust barely settled on its acquisition of game sector companies Xfire and GameTrailers.com, MTV has announced a $175 million deal that will see the music giant take control of *Guitar Hero* developer Harmonix.** MTV's game division has worked with the *Guitar Hero* franchise in the past, though this is a clear indicator that it wishes to exploit the brand's potential further still.

Alex Rigopulos, CEO of Harmonix: "We are very excited to combine our unique assets in the music and gaming space with one of the most recognised brands in the music world. We look forward to continuing to create innovative ways for people to enjoy music."

Exactly what these innovations entail was elaborated on by MTV president Christina Norman: "The acquisition of Harmonix will deepen MTV's connection to its audience via online, mobile and console music gaming, and expand the relationship with both labels and artists through the creation of games based on classic songs as well as future album releases." Such a partnership could lead to amazing things for music in games; it could also lead to *Britney Spears: The Game*. Sweet merciful Jesus, we hope not.

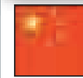



eMag

# DATA STREAM

DOWNLOADING... 40%

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



## PIRATES IN PERIL

**A recent piracy crackdown in China has been deemed a resounding success after 13 million illegal CDs, DVDs and pieces of software were confiscated. The Chinese authorities initiated the 100-day campaign after allegations that the country was the world's major source of pirate material. To date, copyright officers have closed down 9,000 shops and street vendors, 500 publishers and nearly 1,000 websites. In terms of China's population the numbers are still small fry, but the results may prompt other countries to take similar action.**

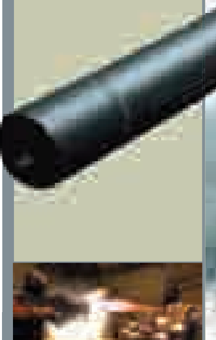




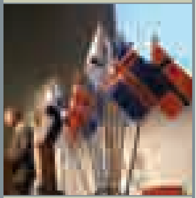
## HE SAID WHAT?

**Sony is at it again. Despite clawing back a little respect after the PR disaster of the last few months, Sony Australia's Michael Ephraim has gone on record branding both Wii and 360 as too expensive. In an interview with Australian newspaper *The Age*, Ephraim commented that Wii is "a lot to fork out for", and branded Xbox 360 "a little pricey". Everyone is entitled to an opinion, but as a representative of the console that has attracted more price-point criticisms than any other, this is surely inviting trouble. This just in, the pot has officially called the kettle black.**

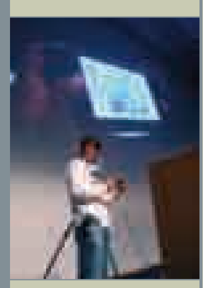




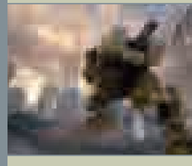
Starbreeze's *Chronicles Of Riddick* showed promise that *The Darkness* looks set to deliver on.



Other countries around the world get greater government support.



Massive hands on a massive screen with a massive PSP. Nice.



In *Battlefield 2142*, Sweden's DICE has one of the strongest game series of the last decade.



# WARNING FROM THE NORTH

## BRITAIN CHIDED FOR LACK OF GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

**Japan and America have long had an unimpeachable grip over the videogame industry.** This duopoly is unlikely to change any time soon, but Scandinavia, which has a per-capita game consumption equivalent to Japan and is home to *Hitman* developer Io Interactive, looks set to join Britain and France as one of the key territories snapping at their heels. The success of the Nordic Game event, held in Malmo, reinforced the area's reputation as a contender, with many speakers attributing the growth to exceptional government support.

Speaking to Gamesindustry.biz, press officer Jacob Riis stated: "Funding has been provided by the Nordic ministers of culture to strengthen the games industry, which Nordic Game 2006 is one result of. This conference is actually in its third year now, and the funding and establishment of the Nordic Game Program has given us the opportunity to host a much larger conference with outstanding content."

The Norwegian minister of culture presented five Nordic companies with grants worth 250,000 Euros each, in order to encourage the development of games inspired by local heritage and national identity. It is a level of governmental commitment lacking in Britain, a sentiment echoed by the event's organiser Erik Robertson. Speaking at the show, Robertson said: "If the British government and politicians keep refusing to support their industry – as I understand it, the third in the world in terms of size – from the Nordic perspective: good idea.

I view it as a cultural industry," he continued. "I think it is very important that we have ways of telling stories from our own culture in this industry as well as in movies. Of course, we could fill cinemas with British and American movies, but we want to have our own stories as well. Our children should have access to computer games based on Nordic storytelling traditions."

The comparison with movies is a telling one. The notion of a British film industry is sharply defined, with new movies often marketed on the basis of their origins. In videogames it is much less so: British product is often lost among that from Japan and America. Whether British games need to adopt a greater sense of national identity is a matter of opinion, though it would surely do no harm to shout a little more loudly when an indigenous game enjoys success.

"IT WOULD SURELY DO **NO HARM TO SHOUT** A LITTLE MORE **LOUDLY** WHEN AN **INDIGENOUS GAME ENJOYS SUCCESS"**


eMag

DATA STREAM

DOWNLOADING... 60%

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



## COMING UP

After decades of dominance by the Japanese and, more importantly, American markets, the industry is showing signs of becoming more democratic than ever. Alain Tuscan, VP of EA Canada, recently suggested that more than half of the publishing giant's future revenue should almost certainly be coming from outside of traditionally accepted gaming centres. Industry presence in once dormant markets like India and China will play their part, but it is also indicative of the growing success of developers in the UK, Scandinavia and Canada.





## LAST CRUSADE

A spokesman for LucasArts has warned developers to make the next generation about more than just graphics. Pointing out the sterling work done on Davy Jones for *Pirates Of The Caribbean 2*, Chris Williams suggested that games are still a long way behind films in terms of visuals, and gameplay should still be the primary focus. A fair point, though Williams used it to plug LucasArts' *Indiana Jones* title, showing off the impressive combat simulation. Williams said it is unlikely that games will reach cinematic levels of visual sophistication, *"this generation, or even the one after that."*



# THE OTHER ACADEMY AWARDS

## GHOST RECON TAKES HOME BEST GAME AT

■ The much overlooked *Psychonauts* received a well deserved award for its screenplay.



■ Nick Rhodes' award for *Electroplankton*'s sound was accepted by his avatar from within *Second Life*.

Few would argue that the gaming public need more reasons to argue; supporters of a medium seldom take such pride in debating the details, and by elevating the status of its videogame awards to that of film and television, BAFTA will surely set the forums ablaze. It is unquestionably an important step for the industry in Britain that our premier media awards body has chosen to acknowledge gaming in this way, and Camden's Roundhouse was suitably decked out with the level of glitz many would expect from a high-profile awards bash. The execution of the ceremony itself, however, left a little something to be desired.

Vernon Kaye is the sort of relentlessly perky moppet to keep things bounding along, but the decision to employ 'celebrities' to hand out the awards left games™ extremely cold. The Action-Adventure award was presented by Dylan Jones, the editor of British *GQ*, a magazine that offers barely a single column inch to the gaming industry; the Innovation award was left to obscure TV presenter Sarah Hendy, who upon seeing *Guitar Hero*, evidently for the very first time, commented, "Ooh, that guitar one looked good didn't it?"

The presence of respected figures like Krishnan Guru Murphy and John Culshaw was appreciated, but there was little to suggest they were there for anything more than their fee and a goody bag. Serious ceremonies normally leave presentation to peers and contemporaries of the winners, a tactic that raises the gravitas of the occasion, and many attendees agreed that more key players from the industry should be involved in the future. Even so, television's Iain Lee delivered a much needed shot of humour to the proceedings. Commenting on his memories of gaming, Lee remembered, "Two of us hunched over a ZX Spectrum w**king to *Sam Fox Poker*. I'm gonna stay here all night, you can f**k off."

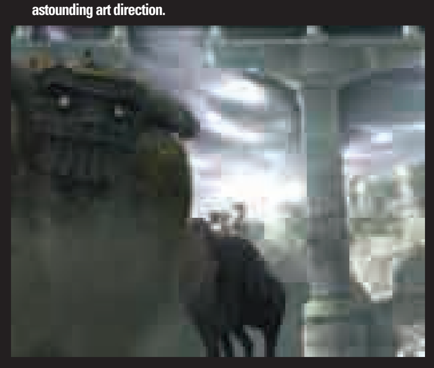
The awards themselves were always going to be divisive, but there was a sense that BAFTA was trying to award as many separate games as possible rather than those truly worthy. The wonderfully simplistic mechanics of *LocoRoco* lost out to the fanboy thrills of *Lego Star Wars II* in the gameplay category, but then, it had already

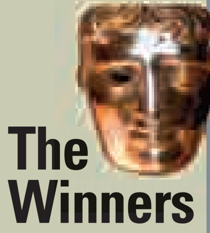


# BAFTAS

pocketed two gongs by that point. Likewise, the Casual And Social award went to *Buzz! The Big Quiz* over the more deserving winner, *Guitar Hero*, though that was to be awarded for Soundtrack. The ceremony will no doubt become more refined over time, but until then we can at least thank BAFTA for fuelling the fires of debate; something, to return to our original point, we gamers just love to do.

■ *Shadow Of The Colossus* was justly recognised for its astounding art direction.





## The Winners

**Innovation**
*Dr Kawashima's Brain Training*

**Artistic Achievement**
*Shadow Of The Colossus*

**Character**
*LocoRoco*

**Strategy**
*Rise & Fall Civilizations At War*

**Casual And Social**
*Buzz! The Big Quiz*

**Screenplay**
*Psychonauts*

**Children's**
*LocoRoco*

**Gameplay**
*Lego Star Wars II*

**Simulation**
*The Movies*

**Multi-player**
*Dungeons & Dragons Online*

**Action And Adventure**
*Shadow Of The Colossus*

**Technical Achievement**
*Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter*

**Sports**
*Fight Night Round 3*

**Original Score**
*Tomb Raider Legend*

**Soundtrack**
*Guitar Hero*

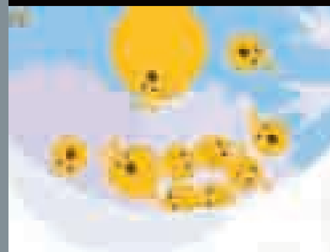
**Audio**
*Electroplankton*

**Best Game**
*Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter*

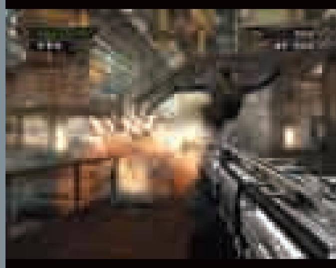
## games™ THE TOP FIVE
## BAFTA AMENDMENTS



**No.5 CASUAL AND SOCIAL**
*Guitar Hero*



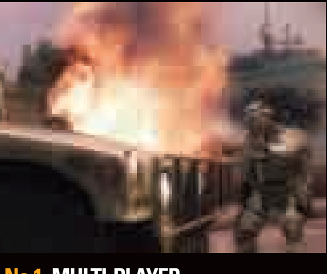
**No.4 GAMEPLAY**
*LocoRoco*



**No.3 TECHNICAL ACHIEVEMENT**
*Black*



**No.2 ORIGINAL SCORE**
*LocoRoco*

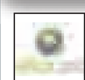


**No.1 MULTI-PLAYER**
*Battlefield 2: Modern Combat*

# DATA STREAM

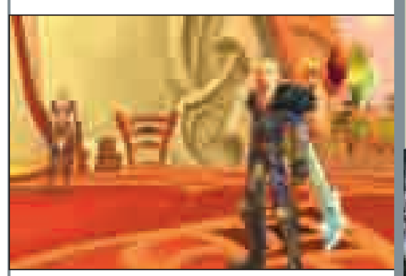
DOWNLOADING... 80%

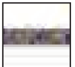
BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



## LEVEL YOUR 360

**Any devotee of *World Of Warcraft* will be aware of the phenomenon of companies charging a fee to raise your character to a level you don't have time to achieve yourself. Now, a website called 'Level My 360' is offering 3,000 GamerPoints for the 'bargain' price of $300. Despite the concept of GamerPoints being, at present, a little shallow, and more reflective of the time you have to spare than your abilities as a gamer, the feverish intensity some have toward the acquisition of points should ensure the scheme's success.**

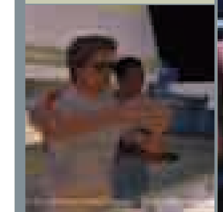




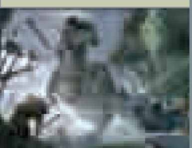
## EXCLUSIVE EVIL

**The absence of *Resident Evil 5* from the Tokyo Game Show immediately sparked Sony baiters into circulating a rumour that the game would be a 360 exclusive. Fanned by ambiguous comments from Xbox Japan boss Takashi Sensui, Microsoft fanboys began rubbing their hands together so hard you could smell the burning skin in China. The spoilsports at Capcom however, were quick to stop the rot and re-introduce common sense to the equation with the news that *Resident Evil 5* will appear on both PS3 and 360 as originally planned.**

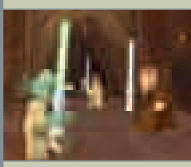




The original *Miami Vice*, one of the worst games in memory, showed just how badly wrong it can go.



Conversely, *King Kong* is an example of a licence taken seriously and handled professionally.



It's not just film and TV licences, even little bits of plastic are getting the videogame treatment.



# WAR OF WORDS

## INSIDERS CLAIM THAT LICENCE POTENTIAL IS RARELY FULFILLED

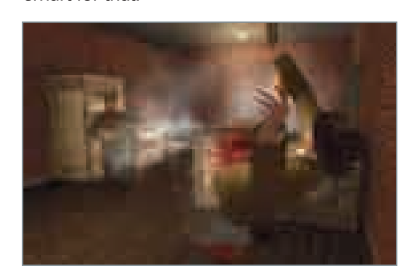
**Movie licences are hardly scarce, and it's testament to their lack of quality that the best examples shine so brightly.** *GoldenEye* stands as perhaps the finest example, but games like *Spider-Man 2*, *The Warriors* and *King Kong* have all proved that videogames can come close to, and perhaps even surpass, the cinematic experience.

It stands to reason; the most popular movies often sacrifice character and story for the more visceral delights of special effects and set pieces, qualities that can be easily translated to videogames. We'll never see *Shakespeare In Love: The Game*, but then, we'd never want to. The problem is that licences have become the preserve of those looking for a guaranteed audience and a quick buck – traits that are hardly conducive to making the best product.

This doesn't have to be the case. In an exclusive interview with Gamesindustry.biz, Hugh Binns, co-founder of Eurocom, which has developed games for the *Batman*, *Bond* and *Harry Potter* licences, said: "There are still too many rubbish licensed games that are obviously rushed and buggy… There are challenges with any licence. There is often a limited amount of time due to a critical release date, which can be compounded by the number of dependencies around assets and reference delivery."

Issues of time and access are inherent to the process, but all too often it is down to a lack of creative talent. When certain licences virtually guarantee high sales, it doesn't make financial sense to increase the overheads in the name of quality. In an interview with Reuters, David McKenna, scriptwriter on *Scarface: The World Is Yours*, criticised the industry for its lack of support at the script stage. "It really is a lot of work and the pay isn't that great," McKenna claimed. "I know they're on really tight budgets for videogames, but if they come to the realisation that they can hire good writers to create videogames, in the long run it will help sell more copies."

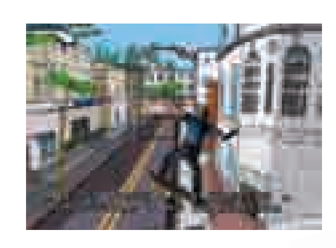
At the root, though, licences will continue to disappoint as long as the industry judges potential on popularity, and not suitability. "When you think about *Jaws* and *The Godfather*, although they were great movies, I don't see them in the same vein as something like *Scarface*," McKenna said. "It gets to the point where you're bastardising the whole business just to make a buck. That's fine, but I think the public are too smart for that."



"**LICENCES WILL DISAPPOINT** AS LONG AS THE INDUSTRY **JUDGES POTENTIAL** ON POPULARITY"

# GAMES ROOM 101

THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF VIDEOGAMING






**As the launch of Wii rapidly approaches, it's likely we'll see more of this irksome trend in game development.** It could be argued that the likes of *Red Steel* and *Call Of Duty 3* are messing with the successful FPS formula, but it's not these games that we should be concerned about – after all, they could be superb. No, it's the inevitable products that will release once Wii becomes a success – the sports titles with motion-sensitive mini-games, or puzzlers that make you balance the remote on your hand for no apparent reason.

Is this the price we have to pay for innovation? Perhaps – money-hungry publishers exploiting the stupid is hardly new. Spare a thought for development teams though; it's rarely them who want the kite-flying mini-game in their genre-bending noir thriller.

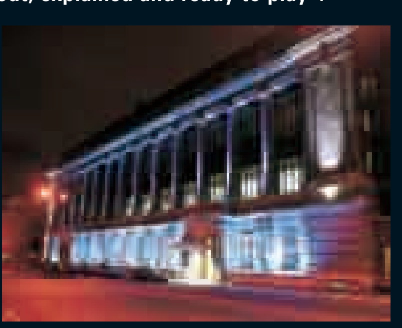
# ART TO ART

## Game On videogame art exhibition to run in London until February

The Science Museum in London will be home to all things videogaming this winter. The Game On exhibition, previously hosted at the Barbican, is once again delivering its unique look at the history and culture of videogames.

It opened last month and, as ever, the show will focus on videogame-influenced art. As the medium ingrains itself further into mainstream culture, the number of painters, sculptors and mixed-media artists who are influenced – be it consciously or subconsciously – will increase, just as multimedia culture has influenced modern art.

Programmes developer for the Science Museum, Gaetan Lee, is "particularly excited" about the exhibition, exclaiming that: "Nowhere else will people be able to see the entire history of the games industry laid out, explained and ready to play".

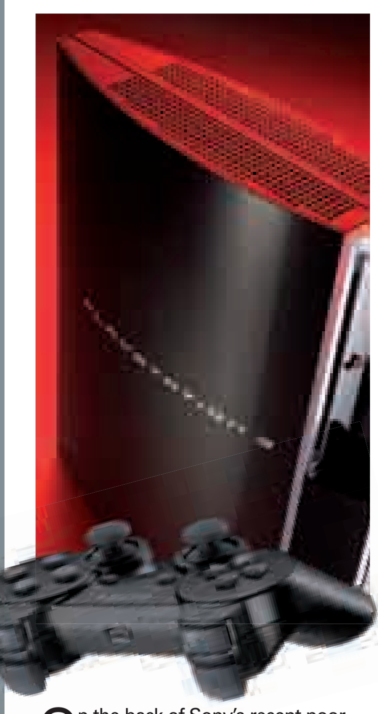


With commissioned pieces by acclaimed artist Jon Burgerman, drawings by Shigeru Miyamoto and a host of playable games dating all the way back to *Space War*, Game On is shaping up to be an essential draw this winter for gamers and non-gamers alike.




# ANTI-SONY STORY

## PLAYSTATION3 RUMOURS OVERHEAT



On the back of Sony's recent poor showings at E3 and Leipzig, it now seems fashionable in the industry for people to bash the Japanese giant and its new machine at every opportunity. The latest rumour to be quashed is that of PlayStation3s overheating – a problem that Xbox 360 has suffered since it launched last year. Unsurprisingly, Sony chiefs have been quick to dismiss the story.

"SCE can categorically deny that there's any problems with PS3 units overheating," Sony issued in an official statement. "As could be seen on the TGS floor by the tens of thousands of media and public attendees, both the hardware and software worked flawlessly."

While we've been the first to criticise Sony for its handling of the PS3, the coming months are going to be mightily boring if the firm constantly has to respond to unnecessary allegations. Unfortunately, it's somewhat of a given that the backlash will spread to rumour and conjecture. Hopefully, this will be a lesson learned for Sony – don't upset the fans, or they'll bite back.




THE PEOPLE IN THE GAMES INDUSTRY TELL IT LIKE IT IS…

## ADVANCED AWARD WINNING



**This month I had the dubious pleasure of attending the BAFTA videogame awards.** It was an altogether enjoyable evening's entertainment, helped – as always – by lashings of free alcohol.

Only when I woke up the next day, amid a hung-over haze, did it actually dawn on me how bizarre the choice of Best Game actually was. Now, I have nothing against *Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter* – it's a damn fine shooter – it's BAFTA's choice of award categories to which I'm opposed. What exactly constitutes the 'best game'? Because I was always under the impression that the best games contained the best gameplay. Not according to BAFTA. That honour belongs to *Lego Star Wars II*. The fact that *GRAW* was nominated for Best Gameplay but did not win is an even more salient point. Surely, if there is a game out there that plays better than *GRAW*, then it is a better game.

All of which makes me question who has devised these categories. It has been drummed into our heads since the dawn of (*Pac*) man that 'gameplay' is a game's most important aspect – a sum of its parts that epitomises the entire experience. A song's melody. A book's story. Gameplay is what a game IS.

So why, when the BAFTA game awards were created to show gaming in a culturally worthy light, has the Academy got it so wrong? And will anyone actually question these categories next year? The award ceremony may be in its infancy, but if it is to be taken as seriously as its film and TV counterparts, then we must treat its subject matter with the same regard. Otherwise, it's just another industry piss-up. And who needs another one of them?

**Mr X wanted *Guitar Hero* to win it all because he's an axe-wielding maniac**

# FROM THE FRONT

DEV COSTS CONTINUE TO RISE / GAME OUTLET LOOKS TO TAKE OVER THE WORLD / EA DOES MOBILE GAMES DEAL WITH NOKIA



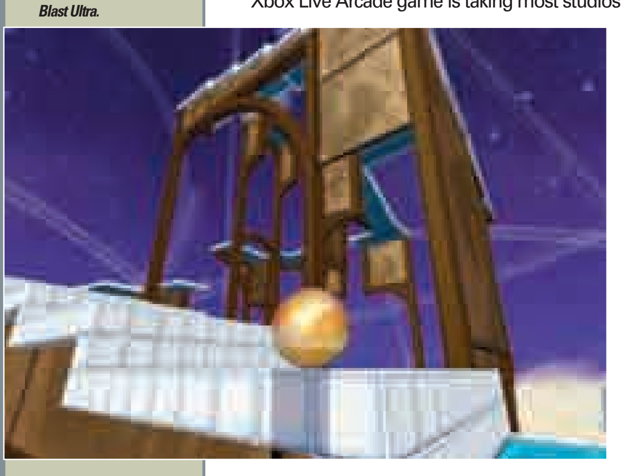


Jeff Tunnell – the man, the myth, the legend.




Xbox Live Arcade – the ruiner of social lives.

The Escher-esque *Marble Blast Ultra*.



# HIDDEN EXPENSES

## XBOX LIVE ARCADE DEVELOPMENT COSTS ARE HIGHER THAN YOU MIGHT THINK

It's no secret that videogame development costs are spiralling out of control, but it has come as somewhat of a surprise to learn that even creating software for Xbox Live Arcade can cost a fortune.

Jeff Tunnell, president of GarageGames (those responsible for the magnificent *Marble Blast Ultra*), has revealed that "creating an Xbox Live Arcade game is taking most studios six to twelve months" on his blog. He goes on to explain that "costs are currently ranging from $100,000 to $300,000. The industry standard arms race will quickly make the top end $300,000 budget a cheap product."

This may well come as a slap in the face for any new development studio with ambitions of Xbox Live grandeur, especially when coupled with Tunnell's comments that he "wouldn't consider attempting to make an XBLA game with a $100,000 budget. Development kits and Certification would eat up half of that, not leaving much for the actual game development".

However, much as this may seem, it's still nothing compared to the costs involved in creating a full-priced game, a fact that Tunnell himself reaffirms. "While these budgets may seem high to indies," he says, "these budgets wouldn't buy coffee on a triple-A console title for the retail box channel."

Long gone are the days of minuscule budgets and even smaller returns – gaming has become as costly a business as cinema. Harsh for the independents; fantastic for the fat cats. Isn't that always the way…




# DOWN UNDER

## GAME SNAPS UP AUSTRALIAN RETAILER FOR $3.8 MILLION

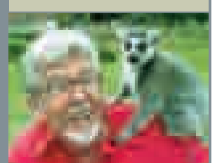
In its continuing quest to take over the world, Game has acquired Australian retail chain The Games Wizards for a cool 3.8 million Australian dollars. The company has been running for ten years, and operates 14 company-owned stores and eight franchises across the continent. This is a huge coup for Game having correctly identified both the size and lack of support that sum up the Australian market.

"The acquisition of The Games Wizards provides the group with an established business and a low cost entry to this important market," said Martin Long, chief executive of the Game group. He continues, "the specialist videogames retail sector is already well established and in terms of software revenue Australasia is already larger than Spain, Italy, Benelux and the Nordic region".

The downside to this move? The shop with both the greatest and worst name of all time will no longer exist. However, if our Antipodean cousins can receive games at the same time as us, then we're sure no one will complain. More on Game's global dominance next month.




Fresh from a high street near you.



Rolf once painted a portrait of The Queen, you know.

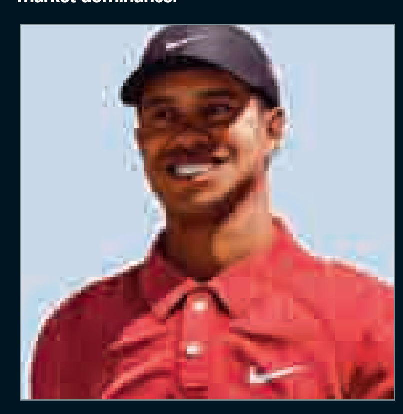
# MOBILE INFANTRY

## NOKIA AND EA TO JOIN FORCES

Electronic Arts has struck up a deal with mobile phone giant Nokia, in which the Canadian publishing monster will supply a range of titles for the forthcoming next-gen mobile phone games platform. Potential consumers will be able to simply download the games straights to their handsets, in a fashion that is rapidly becoming the norm.

Senior vice president of EA, Mitch Lasky, is understandably chirpy about the deal, stating: "Nokia shares our vision of making it easy for people around the world to find and play the best quality games on their mobile phones. We are looking forward to working more closely with Nokia on promoting a delivery system that propels mobile gaming forward. This relationship will bring together EA's great brands and development studios with Nokia's innovative hardware and global consumer reach."

The list of games due for the platform will raise few eyebrows, including the standard EA franchises such as *Tiger Woods*, *FIFA* and *The Sims*, but the inclusion of *Doom* and *Tetris* comes as a pleasant surprise. Mobile gaming is expanding at a phenomenal rate, and this is yet another move towards its eventual mass market dominance.



Never before has Tiger looked so terrifying.



Play the Sims on your phone. Some day soon.




Canada's favourite sons.

# MAGIC SHOW

## "NEW EXCITEMENT. NEW SENSATIONS. A NEW GENERATION." GAMES™ MADE THE TRIP ALL THE WAY TO CHIBA, JAPAN – BUT DID TGS 2006 LIVE UP TO ITS OWN BILLING?

**In the ten years since Japan's Tokyo Game Show was inaugurated, three generations of videogame hardware have been introduced here.** The third generation technically began last year with Microsoft's Japanese 360 system debut, but as far as most Japanese consumers are concerned, it was this year's PlayStation3 entrance which, at last, signalled the beginning of a new generation.

Ken Kutaragi must have been conscious of how important a role PlayStation3 – bastion of the next gen, 1080p gaming and, for Japan, the only viable alternative to Nintendo's ascendant Wii – played at the 2006 Tokyo Game Show, yet throughout his keynote address at the TGS Forum on Friday morning, Kutaragi chose to focus on the technology surrounding his PS3 project and its application in fields such as medicine and science, as opposed to talking about the games which would wow Sony's loyal Japanese audience. Actually, 'focus' is the wrong word.

Kenji Kano, veteran writer for various Japanese game magazines, suggested that Kutaragi's speech had been, "a disaster. It couldn't have been worse. He talked about everything but the PS3 itself, and he made virtually no reference to the games. It was a confused address." The interpreted English version certainly sounded garbled over the supplied headphones, but if that's the effect Kutaragi's ramblings had on the Japanese press as well, he was clearly either ill-advised or wantonly directionless. As Homer Simpson would interject: "If you could just say a few words, you'd be a better public speaker."

To be fair to the 'Father of PlayStation' though, he did, at one point, briefly explain that PSOne, PS2, Mega Drive and PC Engine titles would be available as downloads over the PS3 network at some point in the future. And, when pressed in



Come on, own up. Who gave Ken Kutaragi a microphone.



Reminiscent of a scene from *Dead Rising*, no?





It's like looking into the future. The distant future.

a Q&A session after his main address, Kutaragi also revealed that the 20GB version of the PS3 hardware would retail in Japan at a reduced price of ¥49,980. Sony would, he added, do everything it could to ensure that there were no further launch delays.

**"I JUST HOPE**, after that, Sony has some awesome games on the floor," said one nervous looking PR rep. To the relief of press and public alike, Sony's playable PS3 line up didn't disappoint. Crucially, there was something for everyone. Sega put in a particularly strong PS3 showing across several key genres: *Virtua Fighter 5*, arguably Game Of The Show, is the showcase 3D fighter early PS3 adopters will want; *Virtua Tennis 3*, running at 1080p and 60fps, to stunning effect, improves on previous games in the series by some order of magnitude; and *Sonic The Hedgehog*, while not as spectacular as the *Virtua* duo, nevertheless did a good enough job in demo form of conveying the speed and fun that made *Sonic* so popular 15 years ago.

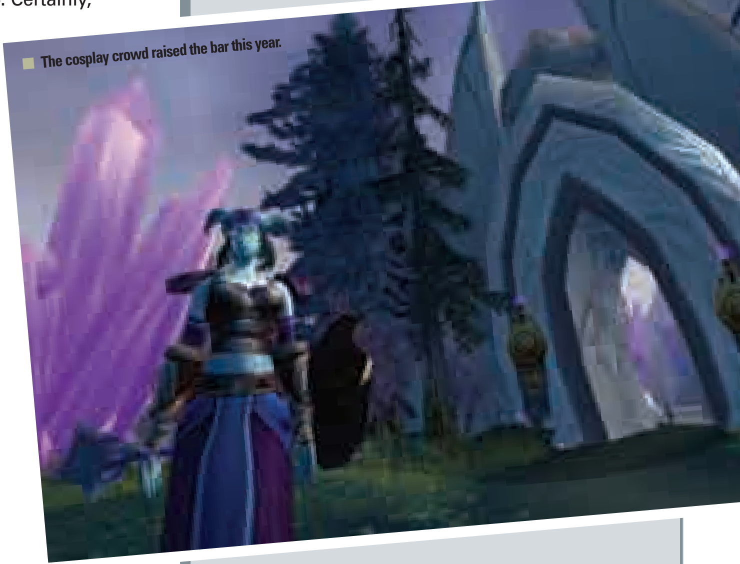
Sony itself, meanwhile, had just one PS2 title – *Everybody's Tennis*, which despite being lovely is actually already on sale in Japan – and a moderately sized PSP corner; the Sony booth was by-and-large devoted to PS3. As at last year's TGS, Sony again used a huge cinema area – partially obscured to passers-by, encouraging the curious to move toward the cinema entrance at Sony's matt black stand – to run a looped reel of new footage from a selection of PS3 titles. Included in the flick was a new *Metal Gear Solid 4* skit complete with a Johnny-5-like robot apparently capable of firing lasers at crotches. A game worth waiting for, then. Playable at Sony's booth were PlayStation3 heavyweights like *Ridge Racer 7*, *Everybody's Golf 5* and *Armored Core 4*, as well as commercial lightweights such as *Railfan* and *Flow*. Regardless of a game's stature however, queues were constant and roughly equal in length; it seemed the public, above other concerns, just wanted to play with the PS3. And on the Saturday of the show, most of the 84,823 in attendance did.

Microsoft, having endured a torrid first year with Xbox 360 in Japan, was keen to put things right with its showing at TGS '06. Certainly, progress was made over the course of a weekend during which Microsoft showed off three major new RPG franchises from some of the most famous names in the Japanese game industry. Queues for the playable demo of Hironobu Sakaguchi and Mistwalker's *Lost Odyssey* typically lasted 60 minutes. Even more impressive was *Blue Dragon* with waiting times pushing more than two hours. *Idol Master*, a 360 conversion of the ever-popular Japanese arcade game in which you train and manage a celebrity girl, was also immensely popular at Microsoft's highly visible white-

# CESA RULES

## VIDEOGAMES HONOURED AT JAPAN GAME AWARDS

**The annual CESA TGS awards are selected by the Computer Entertainment Suppliers Association to celebrate videogames from a Japanese perspective.** This tenth year marks a change of name: it will herein be known as the Japan Game Awards. The prize for Global International Development went to *World Of Warcraft*, but most winners were home-grown. *Nintendogs* and *Final Fantasy XII* shared the award for Domestically Developed Games, while *Animal Crossing* picked up Best Sales with over 3 million copies sold. *Nintendogs* and *Monster Hunter Portable* scooped special awards for Innovation In Design while other titles listed in the Awards For Excellence included *Mario Kart DS*, *Wanda And The Colossus*, *Monster Hunter 2*, *Brain Training*, *Kingdom Hearts II* and *Tamagotchi PuchiPuchi*.


The cosplay crowd raised the bar this year.



# OLD FRIENDS

## TGS RESPECTS ITS ELDERS WITH CURRENT-GEN REPRESENTATION

**PlayStation2 and GameCube were represented at TGS, although their presence was understandably limited.** It took the likes of Tomy Takara and Namco Bandai to breathe life into Nintendo's old machine, with a new mech fighter called *Battle Stadium* and an addition to Takara's *Transformers* series. Both titles attracted small crowds, but Cube is dead in Japan. PlayStation2, of course, is not.

However, only a few PS2 titles at the show really impressed; Sony brought along *Everybody's Tennis* which was set up on just two PS2 monitors, alongside *Everybody's Golf 5* on PS3. Unsurprisingly, there wasn't much interest; it's a great game, but it's already on sale. The Sega Ages 2500 remake of *Virtual On* however, was a pleasant surprise. *OutRun 2 SP* was also playable at Sega's booth, but sadly the game remains obscured from a potential audience – there is still no release scheduled for Japan.



Oversized headphones are all the rage in Japan, although this chap seems quite disappointed by that fact.

"REGARDLESS OF A GAME'S STATURE, **QUEUES WERE CONSTANT** AND ROUGHLY EQUAL IN LENGTH; IT SEEMED **THE PUBLIC JUST WANTED TO PLAY WITH THE PS3**, AND MOST OF THE 84,823 IN ATTENDANCE ON SATURDAY DID"

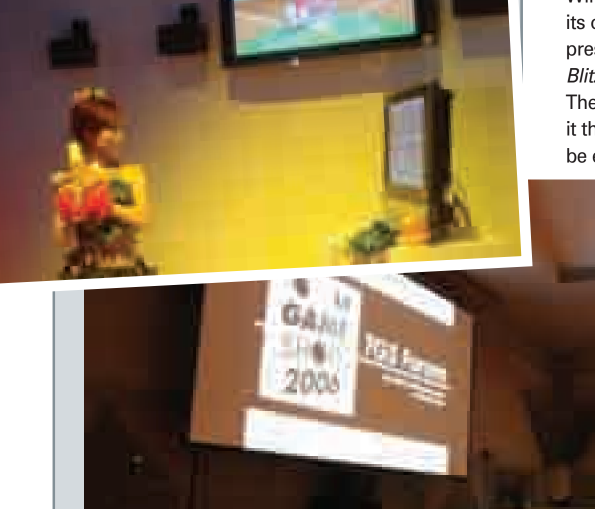
*SONY HAS ONCE AGAIN SUCCESSFULLY INTRODUCED A NEW FORMAT AT TGS*

green stand. *DOA Xtreme 2*, meanwhile, was a big hit at the booths of both Microsoft and Tecmo.

**NINTENDO'S ABSENCE FROM** TGS was to be expected, yet unlike the 2005 show, where Satoru Iwata made a keynote address to introduce the Revolution controller, Nintendo didn't even pop in to say a cheeky 'Hello' this year. The impact of NCL's absence was softened somewhat by third-party independent endeavours to promote their Wii projects. Sega again made a strong case for its own next-gen product, choosing to incorporate presentations of *Sonic*, *Monkey Ball: Banana Blitz* and *Bleach* running on final Wii hardware. The girls employed to play these games gave it their best shot, managing to entertain and be entertained – or at least give the impression that they were being entertained – for marathon sessions. They undoubtedly appeared to be having more fun than most girls at TGS 2006, the vast majority of whom were employed as smiling mannequins. Periodical presentations of *Elebits* at Konami's otherwise Bemani-heavy stand, and *Super Panya Golf* over at Tecmo also proved to be attractive and funny spectacles.

The format of this year's show was a marked improvement over previous years' seemingly ad-hoc layout. The main exhibitors were neatly packed into two large halls, with Microsoft and Sony – whether by design or by accident – kept apart, separated by the walls of the two arenas and an alley full of cosplay enthusiasts. Compared with recent years, there weren't as many peripheral and paraphernalia retailers at TGS 2006, and neither were there quite so many star developer appearances at companies' booths. Instead, we had an unusually large quotient of choreographed dances (highlights included Tecmo's tropical resort girls dancing to sunshine reggae, and NeoWiz's pom-pom-thumping girls' hardcore techno). There were also silly outfit presentations where, for instance, a portly man in a red Teletubby-ish suit wore a blue *Elebits* hat to promote that game. It made perfect sense in context of course, and added immeasurably to the buzz which permeated this year's show.

Inevitably, the biggest softcos had the most space in which to promote their games – and the loudest speakers. Konami handed a mic to Hideo Kojima who provided a running commentary to this year's *MGS4* trailer before a huge crowd of fans. It's becoming an annual obligation. Elsewhere, C-list J-pop stars lent some credibility to the wares of smaller developers, while K-pop dance groups supported the Tokyo Game Show's



This is the first viewing of our editor's next television set. Very minimalist it is too.

## TGS: VITAL STATISTICS

**39,645** visitors on day one

**84,823** visitors on day two

**12,246** children in attendance on day two

**67,943** visitors on day three

**10,637** children in attendance on day three

**650** games on show

**148** companies at TGS

**8** nations represented by companies at TGS

**160,096** total number of visitors at TGS 2004

**176,056** total number of visitors at TGS 2005

**192,411** total number of visitors over three days at TGS 2006




A 'sign' of things to come.

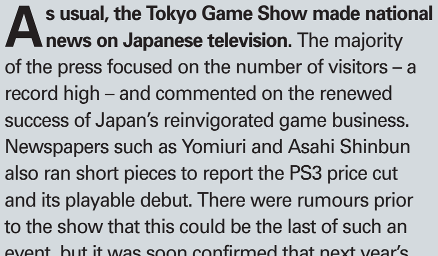
growing number of Korean game companies. Beneath the competition to see who could promote their product the loudest however, there were many more conservative publishers at this year's event – and most of those quiet types happened to be in the mobile phone (keitai) business. The titles on display at the booths of such keitai giants as NTT DoCoMo and KDDI were mostly very impressive: standout games, such as new versions of *Winning Eleven* and *Tekken* were pushing the latest Japanese phone technology to new levels.

**ALTHOUGH THE MOBILE** phone user base in Japan far outweighs that of handheld consoles, Sony and Nintendo, and their third-party allies, maintain a more lucrative handheld game market in Japan. PlayStation Portable made a perfect debut at the 2004 Tokyo Game Show, and even though some of its shine has since faded, TGS 2006 was also a good vintage for Sony's format. SquareEnix, with *Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII*, and Konami, with *Metal Gear Bande Dessinée* and *Metal Gear: Portable Ops*, ensured that PSP was seen in a good light. Nintendo's DS, supported at TGS only by third-party developers, presented something of an anomaly: it's by far the most successful system in Japan today, yet its Tokyo Game Show presence was understated with few significant new projects.

Ultimately, TGS 2006 was about the new generation. New sensations were difficult to find yet there were some to be had: the beautiful floating sensation in *Flow* on PS3, for instance. New excitement? In spite of the lukewarm-to-cynical response from some areas of the international press, Japan and its opinion-shapers are clearly excited by PlayStation3; local game magazines have been hugely enthusiastic about its price cut. This time next year the picture may well be markedly different, but, as it did with PSP, Sony has again successfully introduced a new format at the Tokyo Game Show. And the event itself did live up to its billing – 192,411 visitors made it the biggest TGS yet.

## JAPANESE REACTION

### TOKYO GAME SHOW STIRS INTEREST ACROSS JAPAN



**As usual, the Tokyo Game Show made national news on Japanese television.** The majority of the press focused on the number of visitors – a record high – and commented on the renewed success of Japan's reinvigorated game business. Newspapers such as Yomiuri and Asahi Shinbun also ran short pieces to report the PS3 price cut and its playable debut. There were rumours prior to the show that this could be the last of such an event, but it was soon confirmed that next year's show had already been planned. Clear a space on 21 September for TGS 2007.




It'll be a long time before we see any of these on shop shelves.



Will 360 make any impact in the East?

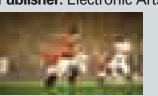
# RELEASE LIST

CALM YOUR FEVERISH ANTICIPATION WITH OUR COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF FORTHCOMING RELEASES

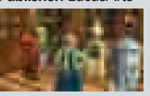


## MULTI-FORMAT CHART

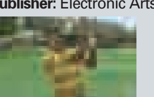
**1** FIFA 07
**Format:** Multi
**Publisher:** Electronic Arts



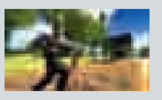
**2** LEGO STAR WARS II
**Format:** Multi
**Publisher:** LucasArts



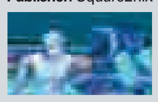
**3** TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 07
**Format:** Multi
**Publisher:** Electronic Arts



**4** JUST CAUSE
**Format:** Multi
**Publisher:** Eidos



**5** KINGDOM HEARTS II
**Format:** PS2
**Publisher:** SquareEnix



**6** CARS
**Format:** Multi
**Publisher:** THQ

**7** COMPANY OF HEROES
**Format:**PC
**Publisher:** THQ

**8** DR KAWASHIMA'S BRAIN TRAINING: HOW OLD IS YOUR BRAIN?
**Format:** DS
**Publisher:** Activision

**9** LMA MANAGER 2007
**Format:** Multi
**Publisher:** Codemasters

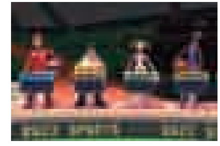
**10** PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 3
**Format:** 360
**Publisher:** Microsoft



## THIS MONTH – NOVEMBER

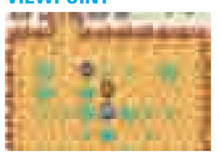
| Date | Title | Format |
|---|---|---|
| 03 Nov | F.E.A.R. | 360 |
| 03 Nov | GTA: Vice City Stories | PSP |
| 03 Nov | Medal Of Honor: Heroes | PSP |
| 03 Nov | Need For Speed Carbon | 360, DS, GBA, GC, PC, PS2, PSP, Xbox |
| 03 Nov | Neverwinter Nights 2 | PC |
| 03 Nov | Sims 2: Festive Holiday Stuff | PC |
| 10 Nov | Age Of Empires: The Age Of Kings | DS |
| 10 Nov | Buzz! The Sports Quiz | PS2 |
| 10 Nov | Championship Manager 2007 | 360, PS2, PSP |
| 10 Nov | Mario Slam Basketball | DS |
| 10 Nov | Medieval II: Total War | PC |
| 10 Nov | Pokémon Mystery Dungeon | DS, GBA |
| 10 Nov | Prince Of Persia: Rival Swords | PSP |
| 10 Nov | Pro Evolution Soccer 6 | DS, PSP |
| 10 Nov | World Of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade | PC |
| 10 Nov | WWE Smackdown Vs RAW 2007 | 360, PS2, PSP |
| 17 Nov | Call Of Duty 3 | 360, PS2, Xbox |
| 17 Nov | Family Guy | PSP |
| 17 Nov | Final Fantasy VII: Dirge Of Cerberus | PS2 |
| 17 Nov | Gears Of War | 360 |
| 17 Nov | Harvest Moon DS | DS |
| 17 Nov | Lumines II | PSP |
| 17 Nov | Sonic The Hedgehog | 360 |
| 17 Nov | Sonic Rivals | PSP |
| 24 Nov | Contact | DS |
| 24 Nov | Football Manager 2007 | 360 |
| 24 Nov | Phantasy Star Universe | 360, PC, PS2 |
| 24 Nov | Sega Mega Drive Collection | PS2, PSP |
| 24 Nov | Star Fox Command | DS |
| 24 Nov | Tony Hawk's Project 8 | 360, PS2, PSP, Xbox |
| 24 Nov | Warhammer: Mark Of Chaos | PC |
| 30 Nov | Rainbow Six Vegas | 360 |

### VIEWPOINT



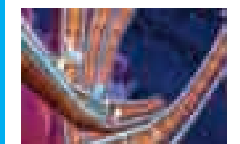
**BUZZ! THE SPORTS QUIZ**
**Format:** PS2
**Publisher:** Sony
Great fun at Christmas, but will *Sports* be as accessible as *Music*?

### VIEWPOINT



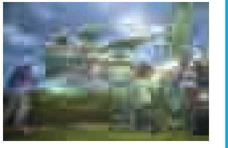
**POKÉMON MYSTERY DUNGEON**
**Format:** DS, GBA
**Publisher:** Nintendo
Don't be put off by the licence, *Mystery Dungeon* RPGs are fun.

### VIEWPOINT



**SONIC RIVALS**
**Format:** PSP
**Publisher:** Sega
Good old *Sonic* gameplay with a 3D lick of paint makes this a definite one to watch.

### VIEWPOINT



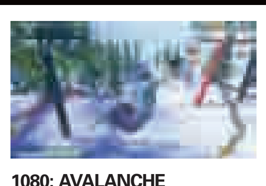
**PHANTASY STAR UNIVERSE**
**Format:** 360, PC, PS2
**Publisher:** Sega
It's been a long time coming, but it should be worth it. As long as the cheaters stay offline…

## BARGAIN BASEMENT

The best deals this month

**JUST CAUSE**
**Format:** 360
**Publisher:** Eidos
**Where:** www.play-asia.com
**Price:** £24.07
A good game is a good game no matter what the price, but when it's on sale for half the moeny, it does make it seem that little bit better. Just buy it.





**1080: AVALANCHE**
**Format:** GameCube
**Publisher:** Nintendo
**Where:** www.game.net **Price:** £4.98
At only 98p more than this very magazine, how can you say no?



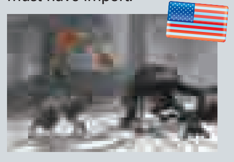
**KING KONG**
**Format:** 360
**Publisher:** Ubisoft
**Where:** www.hmv.co.uk **Price:** £13.99
It's much better than the film, and at £14 it must be the cheapest 360 game around.

Check out the bargains thread at www.gamestm.co.uk/forum for bang-up-to-date deals. Your find could well feature on these hallowed pages.

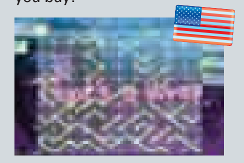


# gamesTM IMPORT WATCH

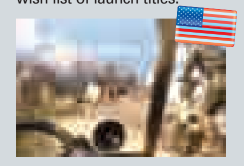
## ZELDA: TWILIGHT PRINCESS
**Format:** GC, Wii
**Publisher:** Nintendo
If you absolutely cannot wait the extra three weeks until the UK launch (and, to be honest, we can't blame you) then *Twilight Princess* will be a must-have import.



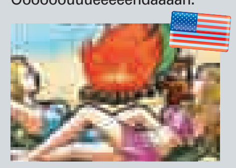
## GUNPEY
**Format:** DS, PSP
**Publisher:** Namco-Bandai
The classic Wonderswan puzzle game, reinvented by Mizuguchi's magical musical mind, is coming to both handhelds. Which one will you buy?



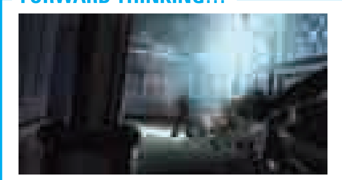
## MOTORSTORM
**Format:** PS3
**Publisher:** Sony
If we were importing a PS3 then this graphically astounding racing game would definitely be on our wish list of launch titles.



## ELITE BEAT AGENTS
**Format:** DS
**Publisher:** Nintendo
We've been yearning for this sequel to *Ossu! Tatakae! Ouendan* for over a year and now it's finally arrived. Oooooouuueeeeendaaaan.



### FORWARD THINKING…



**ALONE IN THE DARK**
**Format:** 360, PC, PS3
**Publisher:** Atari
The original survival-horror makes a comeback, but can it match up to the spine-chilling *Resi 4*?
Q1 '07

## DECEMBER

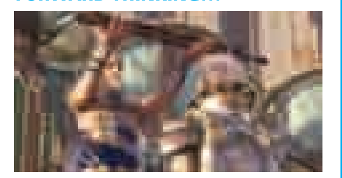
| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 01 Dec | The Con | PSP |
| 01 Dec | SNK Vs Capcom: Cardfighters | DS |
| 01 Dec | World Championship Darts | PC, PS2 |
| 01 Dec | Yoshi's Island DS | DS |
| 08 Dec | Call Of Duty 3 | Wii |
| 08 Dec | Dead Or Alive Xtreme 2 | 360 |
| 08 Dec | Guilty Gear Judgment | PSP |
| 08 Dec | King Of Fighters XI | PS2 |
| 08 Dec | The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess | GC, Wii |
| 08 Dec | Rainbow Six Vegas | PSP |
| 08 Dec | Rayman: Raving Rabbids | 360, DS, GBA, PC, PS2, Wii |
| 08 Dec | Red Steel | Wii |
| 08 Dec | Resident Evil 4 | PC |
| 08 Dec | Samurai Shodown 6 | PS2 |
| 08 Dec | Super Monkey Ball: Banana Blitz | Wii |
| 08 Dec | Tony Hawk's Downhill Jam | Wii |
| 08 Dec | Wii Play | Wii |
| 12 Dec | WarioWare Smooth Moves | Wii |
| TBC | Far Cry Vengeance | Wii |
| TBC | Guitar Hero II | 360, PS2 |
| TBC | Viva Piñata | 360 |

### FORWARD THINKING…



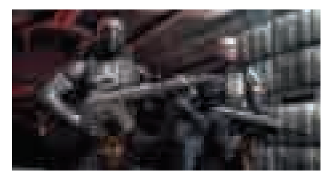
**SUPER SMASH BROS BRAWL**
**Format:** Wii
**Publisher:** Nintendo
You can make Solid Snake kick Pikachu or Kirby in the face? Sold.
2007

### FORWARD THINKING…



**FINAL FANTASY XII**
**Format:** PS2
**Publisher:** SquareEnix
The current generation isn't over until SquareEnix says so. It's great, so this'll be a must buy.
2007

### FORWARD THINKING…



**CRYSIS**
**Format:** PC
**Publisher:** Electronic Arts
Crytek's glorious looking FPS really cannot come quick enough for our liking.
2007

## JANUARY

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 05 Jan | Huxley | 360 |
| 12 Jan | BioShock | 360, PC |
| 12 Jan | Lost Planet | 360 |
| 12 Jan | Mass Effect | 360 |
| 12 Jan | World Snooker Championship 2007 | 360, PS2, PSP |
| 26 Jan | Maelstrom | PC |
| 26 Jan | Shadowrun | 360 |

## FEBRUARY

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 01 Feb | Brothers In Arms: Hell's Highway | 360, PC |
| 02 Feb | Okami | PS2 |
| 02 Feb | Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles | 360, DS, GBA, PC, PS2, PSP, Xbox |
| 16 Feb | Capcom Puzzle World | PSP |

## MARCH

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| TBC | Call Of Duty 3 | PS3 |
| TBC | Fatal Inertia | PS3 |
| TBC | F.E.A.R. | PS3 |
| TBC | Genji: Days Of The Blade | PS3 |
| TBC | MotorStorm | PS3 |
| TBC | Rainbow Six Vegas | PS3 |
| TBC | Resistance: Fall Of Man | PS3 |

### FORWARD THINKING…



**SHINING WIND**
**Format:** PS2
**Publisher:** Sega
A UK release hasn't been confirmed, but we love the *Shining* series. Please make it happen, Sega.
TBC

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| TBC | Ridge Racer 7 | PS3 |
| TBC | Sonic The Hedgehog | PS3 |
| TBC | The Darkness | 360, PS3 |
| TBC | Untold Legends: Dark Kingdom | PS3 |

## TBC '07

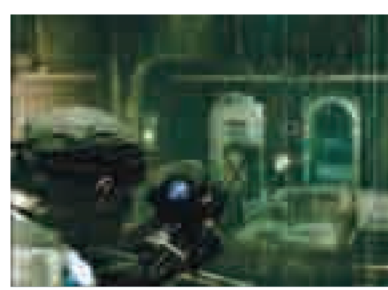
| | | |
|---|---|---|
| TBC | Alan Wake | 360, PC |
| TBC | Alone In The Dark | 360, PC, PS3 |
| TBC | Assassin's Creed | 360, PS3 |
| TBC | Chibi-Robo: Park Patrol | DS |
| TBC | Colin McRae DIRT | 360, PC, PS3 |
| TBC | Crysis | PC |
| TBC | Devil May Cry 4 | PS3 |
| TBC | Elite Beat Agents | DS |
| TBC | Final Fantasy III | DS |
| TBC | Final Fantasy XII | PS2 |
| TBC | Half-Life 2 | 360, PS3 |
| TBC | Heavenly Sword | PS3 |
| TBC | Heroes Of Mana | DS |
| TBC | Kane & Lynch: Dead Men | 360, PC |
| TBC | The Legend Of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass | DS |
| TBC | Lunar Knights | DS |
| TBC | Metal Gear Solid 4 | PS3 |
| TBC | Metroid Prime 3: Corruption | Wii |
| TBC | Sadness | Wii |
| TBC | Shining Wind | PS2 |
| TBC | Shining Force EXA | PS2 |
| TBC | Sonic And The Secret Rings | Wii |
| TBC | Space Giraffe | 360 |
| TBC | S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow Of Chernobyl | PC |
| TBC | Stranglehold | 360, PS3 |
| TBC | Super Mario Galaxy | Wii |
| TBC | Super Smash Bros Brawl | Wii |
| TBC | Virtua Fighter 5 | PS3 |

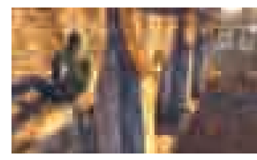
***PLEASE NOTE:** While every effort has been made to ensure these dates are correct at the time of going to press, they are liable to change at short notice. Which is completely beyond our control, so don't go giving us evils.*

## ESSENTIAL PURCHASE
You'll definitely be wanting these

### GEARS OF WAR
**Format:** 360
**Publisher:** Microsoft

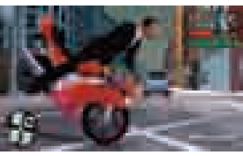
Microsoft's Christmas hope is here, and it's as big, brash and beautiful as we all hoped. Thrilling combat, stunning visuals and a war zone exuding a tangible atmosphere of dread, this could be the birth of a new franchise.





### RAINBOW SIX VEGAS
**Format:** 360 **Publisher:** Ubisoft

Be sure to buy a Vision Camera along with this one. We love to see our opponent's faces before we shoot 'em right between the eyes.



### GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY STORIES
**Format:** PSP **Publisher:** Rockstar

It's sure to rocket straight into the Christmas top ten and deservedly so. The most ambitious PSP game yet.



# LETTER FROM AMERICA

WITH GENUINE AMERICAN BRANDON SHEFFIELD

Have the most ridiculous conversations of all time in *Phantasy Star*.

**"SEGA'S LIKE THE GIRL WHO WAS THE SCHOOL HOTTIE LIVES IN A TRAILER PARK WHILE STILL MAINTAINING THAT**

This week I played *Phantasy Star* for the first time. Is it shameful or praiseworthy that I've managed to eschew a much-hyped game that critics laud? I know what you're thinking, and you're right. These days it's such a simple thing to know about contemporary or obscure games. The Internet has shrunk everything to the point where fan-made titles across the globe are barely even mysterious any more. You can be informed about games just by paying attention. So what are we poor elitists to do to prove our superiority? Knowledge of the shadowy past, of course. Back in the day, it was difficult to know about *Shinrei Jusatsushi Taromaru* for Saturn, or the Playdia, or the MII, or *Kishin Douji Zenki: Vajura Fight* for PC-FX. Not a lot of folk are familiar with that stuff even now, so we can claim some sort of victory there, for as long as our memories hold out.

And so it's with shame that I admit I never got into *Phantasy Star* in the past. I knew it existed, I was peripherally interested, but I could never afford them in their own respective eras. Luckily, I got invited to a free North American closed beta for the PC version of *Phantasy Star Universe*. Not only was it my first *Phantasy Star*, it was my first MMO, though it's certainly MMO-lite. Like *PSO* before it, the emphasis is on small groups of friends going off questing against AI-based enemies, not PVP or any of those complex ego-crushing/boosting/ridiculing things. And I prefer it this way. However, being my first, it was difficult for me to acclimatise. The first problem was that I couldn't figure out how to talk to other people, let alone discern where to go or what to do. I wandered around until I happened upon a human being – I knew it was human because it didn't disappear when I approached, as in-game 'crowds' tend to do. It took a while to find another real player, as this was a 100-person beta across two servers, with three worlds on each. I found someone with large breasts by the name of Shana – clearly a chap acting out his female fantasies. I was represented by a monolithic gentleman with a shockingly white afro and faux-Chinese fighting wear – an accurate depiction of the real me. (Or maybe my ego.) I adjusted my character's voice to be as high and squeaky as possible for maximum absurdity. Neither of us knew how to type to each other, and the hotkeys that let you type common things like 'hello', and 'hi', were all too easy to hit by accident. So our conversation involved lots of confused salutations ('hello' 'hi' 'hi' hello') and acknowledgement that we were both new to this ('Not sure how to type', 'I'm totally lost too').

It turns out you hit spacebar to type – easy – but hit something else first, like the hotkeys or one of the socials, and you wind up saying 'hi', or 'follow me', or simply sitting down for no reason. Plus, when we finally got something out, we usually lost the first word before we hit space. Shana and I parted with little fanfare.








## BUT IS NOW OVERWEIGHT AND 'LOVE ME IF YOU DARE' ATTITUDE"

I eventually got things going. I learned, from talking it over with pals, that this has some nice points over the last game – you can hold a one-handed sword, and a handgun at the same time. Nice, as on the keyboard you can hit down to attack with the sword, then hold up and hit down again to use the gun. You can also toggle a useful first-person mode which lets you snipe flying creatures, bosses and so on, from a safer distance. It's cheap so I stayed a hunter instead of becoming a diabolical ranger.

Everything would be rosy, if only Sega knew how to make a 3D camera in a third-person action-oriented game. It's only had, what, 12 years to figure it out? The thing still gets stuck behind walls, turns around so you can't see enemies, and all the usual Sega tricks. Sega's like the girl who was the school hottie but is now overweight and lives in a trailer park while still maintaining that 'love me if you dare' attitude. Still, you'll have a go for the sake of memories – and it's not quite that bad.

All told though, *PSU* seems a pleasant experience with nice last-gen graphics, interesting weapons, and enjoyable, not-so-drab environments. Plus it's brought back the beloved genre of cheesy, vocal-infused tracks made popular by Richard Jacques in *Sonic R Endearing*, is what it is.

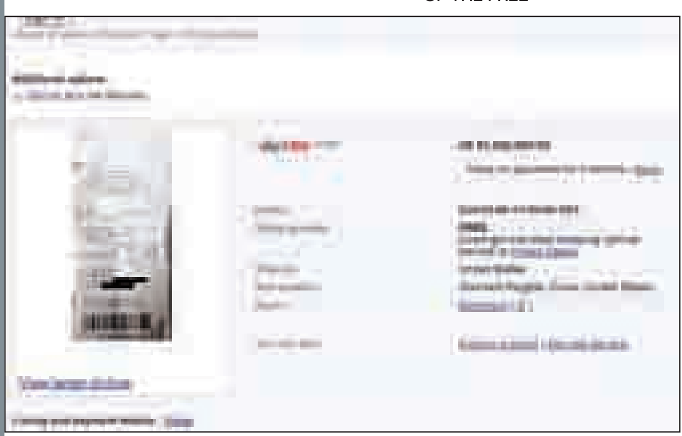
In the time that I spent with the beta, I didn't get one racial slur, nobody said they would PWN me, and people were generally nice and helpful. I guess that's what happens when you make a game that doesn't foster direct competition, and where the only goal is self and team-improvement. Or… maybe they just chose the right hundred people.

**Many thanks**

Brandon

# AMERIKAAN

PRODUCTS, PLACES, SERVICES AND EVENTS FROM THE LAND OF THE FREE

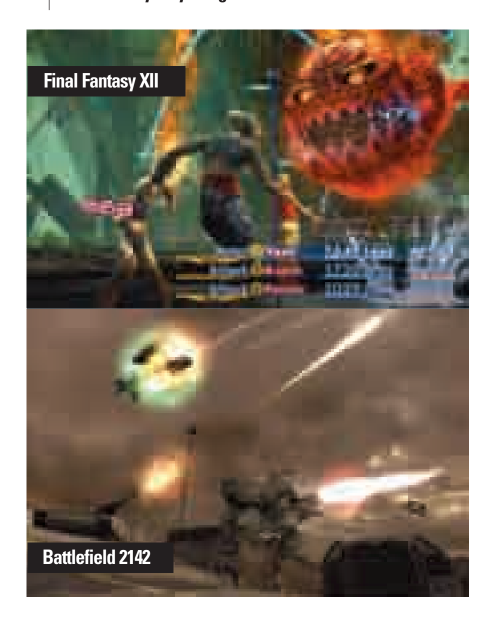


## PS3 PRE-ORDER MADNESS

**People lined up like fools to pre-order a PlayStation3 to sell on eBay this week, only to discover that most game store employees had already bought the majority. It's a sad world when cheating your company is the only way to make some decent scratch, but I'll admit I've been looking for the games™ exploitation angle since I got in here.**

## US MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

| | Title | Publisher | Format |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Microsoft Flight Simulator X | Microsoft | PC |
| 2 | The Sims 2: Pets | Electronic Arts | Multi |
| 3 | Final Fantasy XII | SquareEnix | PS2 |
| 4 | Battlefield 2142 | Electronic Arts | Multi |
| 5 | Warhammer 40K Dawn Of War: Dark Crusade Expansion Pack | THQ | PC |
| 6 | Madden NFL 07 | Electronic Arts | PS2 |
| 7 | New Super Mario Bros | Nintendo | DS |
| 8 | Brain Age | Nintendo | DS |
| 9 | Pokémon Mystery Dungeon Red | Nintendo | GBA |
| 10 | Pokémon Mystery Dungeon Blue | Nintendo | DS |


Final Fantasy XII

Battlefield 2142



# KONGETSU*

WITH JAPANESE CORRESPONDENT TIM ROGERS

■ It was 360's *Blue Dragon* and *Lost Odyssey* that attracted the attention of gamers back East.

## "LET'S ALL STAND AROUND, GAWKING AT OTHER PEOPLE PLAYING HOW WE GOT THERE BEFORE SAUNTERING OFF WISHING WE WERE

I went to TGS this year, and again, I couldn't move. This is becoming a trend. Once a year, Japanese consumers and game fans, together with an abnormal quantity of non-Japanese journalists, walk the kilometre-long tunnel from the Yamanote Line to the Keiyo Line in Tokyo Station, queuing up for a chance to ride the people-mover. They then ride the train out of Tokyo to Chiba where they will then spend the greater part of a morning and afternoon standing in line to play a single videogame. Usually, it's a game they've never heard of because the lines for the game they wanted to play were so long they just groaned and gave up. Or they stood and watched hula-skirt girls play *Super Monkey Ball* on the Wii. It's a shame Wii was off-limits to general attendees.

Come on down next year – second-to-last weekend of September. 192,000 people showed up this year, so a couple thousand more couldn't hurt. Let's all stand around, gawking at other people playing videogames, wondering how we got there before sauntering off wishing we were playing something else.

The big lines this year were for Microsoft's *Lost Odyssey* and *Blue Dragon*, two spectacular looking games produced by *Final Fantasy* creator Hironobu Sakaguchi. It seems Sakaguchi has taken up the challenge of making the first Japanese titles for the console that will actually end up hits in Japan.

Just recently, Capcom shattered the first barrier by shipping a million copies of *Dead Rising* worldwide, effectively qualifying it as the first Xbox hit in Japan. Can a bona fide hit in Japan be far off? Well, judging by the interest in *Blue Dragon* and *Lost Odyssey*, the answer is yes. And no. Sure, lots of people were lined up, but I'm guessing they were all fanatical crazies who have been following the stormy life story of Sakaguchi for years and stand in awe at his decision to leave SquareEnix after losing more than $100 million on a computer-animated *Final Fantasy* movie that, Square's hindsight has determined, failed because it wasn't directly about *Final Fantasy VII*. They're the kind of fans who are cheering him on with all their might as he crafts a new game (*Blue Dragon*) using the art of Akira Toriyama of *Dragon Ball Z* and *Dragon Quest*, two of Japan's hottest properties, and another new game (*Lost Odyssey*) using the art of Takehiko Inoue the amazingly talented comic artist whose talents range from campy high-school basketball comedy to gritty samurai fiction, and a story by Kiyoshi Shigematsu, a novelist who won Japan's most esteemed literary prize. *Blue Dragon* is increasingly attractive to Japanese consumers now it's been announced as a pack-in with the Core System immediately after its release on 7 December. It'll be about £130 for a 360, *Blue Dragon* (an RPG made by many of the same staff as *Chrono Trigger*), and a controller. Not bad at all.

And then there's the Sony booth. No one game drew in the crowds. They were all merely there to worship the onyx obelisk that






# TEACH YOURSELF JAPANESE

**LESSON #50:** INTERVIEWING TOSHIHIRO NAGOSHI THE PRODUCER OF SUPER MONKEY BALL AND YAKUZA

**Uiiii no suupaa monkii booru wa nande TGS de taiken dekimasen desu ka?**
Why can't we play *Super Monkey Ball* for Wii here at the Tokyo Game Show?

**Nankane, kamera no furasshu ga pikapika de, wiimokon no sensaa ga bagucchautte hanashi ga aru.**
They said something about flash photography tripping up the Wiimote sensor, or something.

**Douse jibun no ie nara kazoku wa furasshu tsuiteru kamera purei chuu ni tsukattenainoni.**
If you're using the thing in your own home, your family isn't going to be taking flash photography of the screen while they're playing, so yeah.

**Uiiii wa dou omoimasu ka?**
What do you think of the Wii?

**Subarashii to omoimasu yo.**
I think it's awesome.

**Tsugi no meisaku nara, dono hontai ni tsukurimasu ka?**
What system do you think you'll make your next masterpiece on?

**Zettai ni Uiiiiiiiiiii janaissuyo.**
Definitely not the Wii.

## VIDEOGAMES, WONDERING PLAYING SOMETHING ELSE"

is PS3. I'll tell you what I saw: more than a hundred mass-market-looking people, with kids with balloons tied around their wrists, standing in line, starting, stopping and restarting their downloads for the latest version of PSP firmware, sighing, shuffling their feet, and starting over again. Traffic around the booth was congested like molecules in mortar. A crowd of more than 500 stood around the back border of the booth, huddled around a PS3 in a glass case, patiently waiting for a turn to take a picture of it with their cell-phone cameras. I stood there staring, maybe kind of slack-jawed, for about ten minutes. People lining up the best possible shot, taking photos, retaking photos, then stepping back and composing an email to their dearest friend, who may be sick in hospital with pneumonia, with the photo as an attachment.

I realised two things: first, that the majority of people on Earth really don't read videogame magazines or websites. And secondly, well, that no non-journalist would dare take a picture of a videogame console in a glass case at a trade show with their cellular phone unless they were so certain enough they wanted it that they were planning to buy it.

**Kind regards**




## DIY TGS?

I've said before that they need more TVs and demo stations, and less booth girls, and so on. There's a lot of wasted space at TGS, and the congestion around the Sony and SquareEnix booths points to over-cautious underestimation of consumer interest (or under-cautious overestimation of the value of horrific photographs of the crowds). After downloading a *Lost Planet* demo on Live a few months ago, and seeing the title screen proclaim 'E3 2006 demo', I have to say that it might be better not to hold these shows at all. Let people conduct TGS in their living rooms. Microsoft tried that this year, but can it work? Maybe it's the fact that most don't have a 360, or even access to one, that led the firm to put up only three demos. Then there were standard definition trailers of a few other games. Man, that was sad. If you've talked to your Japanese cousin lately, maybe you've heard the news: "PS3 is coming, and it has the Internet inside it. You can connect it to the net, and download videos and demos. Isn't that nuts?" So yes, E3 has vanished and part of me predicts TGS will too. Just as soon as someone figures out how to manufacture blue lasers in quantities larger than 100,000 at a time.

## JAPANESE MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

| | Title | Publisher | Format |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Dragon Ball Z: Budokai Tenkaichi 2 | Atari | PS2 |
| 2 | Pokémon Diamond | Nintendo | DS |
| 3 | Pokémon Pearl | Nintendo | DS |
| 4 | Gundam Battle Royale | Bandai | PSP |
| 5 | New Super Mario Bros | Nintendo | DS |
| 6 | Kanken | El Institute | DS |
| 7 | Hot Shots Tennis | Sony | PS2 |
| 8 | Final Fantasy III | SquareEnix | DS |
| 9 | Brain Training 2 | Nintendo | DS |
| 10 | Animal Crossing: Wild World | Nintendo | DS |

(Updated week ending 8 October 2006)


Dragon Ball Z: Budokai Tenkaichi 2

Final Fantasy III



Now, that's using your head **Bonk's Adventure, PC Engine [Hudson] 1990**



1650てん




■ The Galactic Colossus is aptly named.

■ The Cybran Spiderbot will make short work of practically every other unit in the game.



Chris Taylor and Gas Powered Games unveil their vision of the future: an Infinite War fought on a galactic battleground. games™ travels to Seattle to see why game developers can't get enough of high-tech war

■ Assaulting bases requires a massive build-up of forces to overwhelm their defences.

■ Players may form alliances to gang up on players that are doing a little too well.

**Any newcomer to the United States from Britain will be struck by two things: firstly, just how hostile the immigration officials are to very tired people who've not slept on a nine-hour flight, and secondly with the impression of how similar it feels to being in the UK, except that everything's about three times bigger – from the size of the cars and how wide the roads are, to restaurant portions so large that they could resolve several famines in Africa.** Perhaps this sense of familiarity on steroids has permeated the design philosophy of the *Supreme Commander* team at Gas Powered Games, as the first two things that occur to you when playing the game are that it has that warm, familiar feel of other RTS games you have played, and that the scale is mind-boggling.

It's taken Gas Powered Games' Chris Taylor eight years to return to the genre in which he made his name with *Total Annihilation*, but it seems time hasn't dimmed his passion for all things strategic. "When I first got my hands on *Dune 2*, I thought 'This is what it's about, right here. This is the magic', and it just kind of developed into a love affair from there." says Taylor. "Having made a strategy game, my first reaction was 'I've got to make another one – I've got to make it better', just because… that's what a person tends to do. I couldn't do it [immediately after finishing *Total Annihilation*] for various, complex reasons, but I'd been thinking about it for many, many years – about scope, scale and strategy, and about how would I improve the genre."

*Supreme Commander* is the result of these many years of thought, and ▷

it's clear from the first few minutes of play that while the mechanical feel of the game is very similar to other games in the RTS genre, there's something that sets it apart from its peers. The broadness of the game's scope and the sheer scale of the maps get you thinking beyond the tactical level and force you to look at the game in a way most real-time strategy titles don't: strategically.

**IN SUPREME COMMANDER,** effective economic and logistical management plus having an overall awareness of the whole battlefield is just as important as being able to micro-manage combat units at the tactical level. Taylor makes it clear however, that this emphasis on strategy shouldn't limit the game's appeal to more tactically minded players. "If you like tactics, you can still play the game on a smaller map and immediately be in a tactical situation," he explains. "But if you love strategy, pulling that camera back and seeing that there's this giant world and now you've got all this time to think about what the enemy is doing – that's exciting."

Taylor sounds justifiably proud of the layers of strategy he's been able to include in the game. "You can send a recon flight over an enemy base, and that will tell you what's there, but that can lull you into a false sense of security because it's a snapshot view. In a few minutes, what's there will be radically different. You can also track units with radars. The units will appear grey when they haven't been identified, but if you track them for long enough, the detail fills in. You will however, lose that information if they move out of range. Our Intelligence warfare is pretty sophisticated." The large scale of the theatre of war also has other strategic implications. "On the really big maps, if you want to sustain a large projection of power across the map, you need to build forward air bases and a refuelling station, otherwise your air units will run out of fuel before reaching their targets."

With a staggering array of unit types encompassing air, sea and land, a grand scale and the importance of building up your resources and getting a picture of what your enemy has before committing to battle, *Supreme Commander* seems to be trying to bridge the gap between the old-school of tactical RTS games and traditionally hexagon-based war games.

At first, this might sound like an unlikely aim, especially for a game set in a far-future dystopia, but *Supreme Commander* is firmly grounded in realism – not just in trying to simulate a realistic logistical model for a high-tech war (see Mass Driver), but the game setting itself is heavily influenced by current events. The three factions in the game – United Earth Federation (UEF), Aeon and Cybran – are all splinter groups from humanity's exploration into space, all fighting a thousand-year-long war over irreconcilable belief



■ Air and naval units add extra layers to your strategy and can often tip the balance of a game.

## SPLIT PERSONALITY

**As well as providing the flexibility to zoom between the tactical and strategic views of the world, completely at will, perhaps the biggest innovation *Supreme Commander* has to offer is the split-screen view which allows you to monitor the action at both tactical and strategic levels simultaneously. The game even supports a dual-monitor set up – if you're lucky enough to have one – so that you can have one screen dedicated to each viewpoint. This greatly aids the player in multi-tasking between high-level strategic decisions, such as moving reinforcements from their base to the battlefront, and focusing on micro-managing any tactical engagements, or grouping together units as they roll out from your factories. Don't go thinking that having a zoomed-out view detaches you from the action though; depending upon your level of zoom, units are still recognisable and can still be selected and given orders. You can even still track weapons fire on the strategic view, as it is rendered on the map using bright yellow pixels. Though should you prefer a more visceral perspective, you also have the freedom to use both halves of the split screen as fully zoomed-in tactical views. The 3D engine is scaleable enough to be able to render zoomed-in terrain in both windows without noticeably compromising performance. As if that weren't enough, you can even zoom in to a tactical view on the User Interface's mini-map for good measure as well.**

**"ITS SCOPE FORCES YOU TO LOOK AT THE GAME IN A WAY MOST RTS TITLES DON'T: STRATEGICALLY"**



■ The water effects are wonderful.

## OLD SCHOOL

**The recent fashion in RTS has been for single-player campaigns to either only be playable from the perspective of one faction present in the game, or for the narrative to switch focus between sides during the course of the campaign. Chris Taylor told us he wasn't a fan of this narrative model. "I'm kind of old-school in this respect, I really enjoyed the old days and being able to pick a faction and stick with it until the end of the game, rather than switching sides halfway through and end up fighting my own guys before I got closure. So with *Supreme Commander*, you have complete campaigns for each faction." Though he declined to go into specifics about the number of individual missions in each campaign, Taylor was adamant that having three separate faction campaigns didn't mean that they'd compromised on the length of the single-player game. "There's enough play time in each campaign that just playing through the campaign with one faction might be enough for you, before you go off to the skirmish and multi-player. But if you like the game, you may want to play the other factions as well. There's a lot of game there."**

■ The strategic view gives you oversight of the entire battle map. Here, the green Aeon player is under siege on two fronts.

systems. This was a very conscious political statement on the part of Taylor. "I drew all of my inspiration for the three factions from watching television and studying World War II. I think that the story taking place in the game is inspired from what's going on right now, more than ever," he said. "We're so evolved as a world and a people, that war should be easy for us to deal with – as in, not fight them any more. But every time you turn on the television, there's a new one going on. I realised that we [as a species] are predisposed to war. So I created the fiction in the game to support that notion."

Not that this is a completely fatalistic vision: there's still the implication that one person can have the power to change the face of the world, as Taylor goes on to explain, "The Infinite War's been going on for a thousand years, but then you come along as the *Supreme Commander* and you get to end that war."

**AS THE GAME'S** name implies, the *Supreme Commander* is an immensely important individual, and you get to play that role, represented in the game by its most powerful element, the Armoured Command Unit (ACU). This is not only a potent combat unit equipped with an Overcharge attack ability that can destroy most units in one shot, it is also able to build any tech level one structure in the game. This means that as long as you are able to keep your ACU intact, you have the potential to win the game – even if your base has been razed to the ground by an opposing player. This is indicative of the design philosophy to encourage the player to think in the strategic long-term, rather than in the tactical short-term. So instead of forcing a player to fight a battle they cannot win, the flexibility of your ACU and the scale of the game allow you to squirrel yourself away on a remote corner of the map and rebuild from scratch, if necessary. The ACU can also be upgraded with abilities such as heavier defensive shields, better weapons or a short-range teleporter, which reduces the risk of you losing your most important unit when using the ACU offensively.

More often than not however, you will want to keep your ACU heavily defended or hidden, and instead use other units to try and dominate the battlefield. With the largest maps encompassing tens of thousands of square kilometres, there's certainly the scope for truly epic conflicts. It should be no surprise then that the level of unit diversity is equally huge. Each unit is fully rendered in 3D with exquisite detail, and combat is based on the economic cost of a unit being proportional to its power rather than a rock paper scissors system. At the first tech level, you are restricted to cheap, basic air, land and sea units, with the unit types for all the factions ▷

remaining basically identical in terms of capability. At the second tech level, the individual nature of each faction begins to assert itself in both aesthetic style and design philosophy, with the Cybrans preferring walkers to the UEF tanks, for example. At the third tech level, the differences become even more pronounced, with significant divergence in unit capability between the three factions. By the time you reach the final, experimental level of technology, all the units are unique, ranging from mobile tank factories to gigantic UFO-style floating saucer vessels. They tower over the regular low-tech units, and some, such as the Cybran Spiderbot can even destroy smaller units by treading on them. Just be sure to keep it well clear of your ACU as its large feet don't discriminate between friend and foe. Also available in the high-tech endgame are last-resort apocalypse weapons including artillery cannons that make Saddam Hussein's aborted super-gun look like a pea-shooter, as well as the obligatory nukes – a perennial RTS favourite – though here they're genuinely strategic weapons as they're the only unit able to strike across the whole range of the map, regardless of scale.

**SUPREME COMMANDER CERTAINLY** isn't a game for agoraphobics, because you're always left with an impression of the wide open spaces and the sheer hugeness of the game world. This size does come at a price however. Other than the beautiful water effects, environmentally the maps inevitably feel a little samey and bland, especially compared to the sumptuous detail present on the combat units. It's most noticeable at medium zoom levels, but thanks to one of the game's more interesting innovations (see Split Personality), some players may not notice or indeed care.

The split-screen functionality isn't the only fresh idea that *Supreme Commander* brings to the genre. One of more interesting new features is the predictive path-finding timer, which gives you an estimate of how long it will take a unit to reach its destination, or how long it will take a factor to complete its current build order queue. "Strategy is all about feedback," Taylor states. "In most RTS games, you're not given enough information to know whether you're making a bad decision or not." The unit timer functionality, while still a work in progress on the build we played, demonstrated itself to be a great idea and will almost certainly be widely copied. Having this kind of visual feedback, coupled with the greater situational awareness you gain from the strategic map, helps you stop making bad or ill-informed decisions – you can no longer plead ignorance for not knowing that you will be spending 30 or 40 minutes building a nuke, when a better use of your land



■ The individual level of detail on the units is astounding.

■ The small yellow dots on the strategic view track weapons fire.

## MASS DRIVER

***Supreme Commander* eschews the current trend in RTS games by resource gathering as part of its economic model. Using Einstein's theory as the basis of the game economy, there are two resource types: mass and energy. Mass is mined from set extraction points, while energy is gained from the construction of generators. Constant expansion of your resource-gathering capability is crucial to success, especially beyond the mid-stages of a game, where mass extraction points are keenly contested. If you're too cowardly to fight for control of resource points, Einstein offers an alternative. Since mass and energy are equivalent ($E=mc^2$), the mass fabricator unit can convert energy into mass, though you will need a huge energy surplus to be able to run it, otherwise you will cripple your economy entirely, making it impossible to build new units for your army. As a general rule, if you want your economy to prosper, maintaining a 2:1 ratio of generators to mass extraction points usually keeps production lines ticking over. With this in mind, canny players will find that a strategy of targeting an enemy's resource-gathering facilities can be less risky yet more effective than taking their armies head on.**

## FULLY DYSFUNCTIONAL

**One of the biggest challenges for the *Supreme Commander* team was in creating an AI that could not only cope with the unusually large length and breadth of the game maps, but also be adaptable enough to offer the player a consistent level of opposition without being totally predictable. Chris Taylor told us about how they tackled the problem. "At first we created AI archetypes that are almost dysfunctional. I say 'dysfunctional' because they all have one particular trait, so you can learn it and defeat it every time. One is a turtle: a defensive type. Another will come at you with air power, and one will walk the tech tree, for example. So when you learn what kind of tactics these AIs use, it makes them very easy to counter. Once we had these archetypes, we blended these AIs into what we call phenotypes, to create a much more powerful AI. You don't know what they're going to do when you play them. You can't predict whether they're going to come at you from the air, or come at you from land or sea. In the finished game you'll be able to mix and match from the AI archetypes using sliders so that you'll face different strategies over a course of a game. So, maybe for the first hour you'll get a turtle or an AI that uses early rush tactics and then after that maybe it goes after your resources or targets your commander. In the old days, when I previously made an RTS, it was just 'AI… we have one'. Tick. Done. There's more to the AI these days, a little more subtlety."**

factory might be building tanks to fight the scores of enemy units about to invade your base perimeter.

Striking the right balance between giving the player enough feedback to be able to run the battle, without overwhelming them with too much information was probably the biggest design challenge. "I was concerned about the UI. I worked to make sure that the UI was consistent and had the same functionality at both [tactical and strategic] levels," Taylor told us. Clearly the importance of getting the User Interface right was identified at an early stage. At this point the UI is perhaps a little subtle in giving feedback, particularly on the strategic map. This makes the learning curve somewhat steeper than it should be, but Taylor is confident that any problems will be fixed by the time the game reaches open Beta. "The UI is probably the thing we're working on the most at the moment. There's still a lot of tweaking that's going to happen there." This tweaking is critical if the game is to strike a chord with an audience beyond the RTS hardcore.

**BUT ONE THING** is clear: *Supreme Commander* isn't a title being made by people in a comfort zone, pandering to a market. There's a real drive to innovate and show gamers something new. "When you're developing a game that pushes into new areas that haven't been done before, there's always a fear that you're going to create something that might not work as well as you think, or someone's not going to like it," Taylor confided. "You can't get away from that fear that you're jumping into a big black pit and wondering if you're going to hit punji spikes, a mattress, or fall into water at the bottom – you don't know what's at the bottom of that dark pit, but you have to jump in and take the chance. If you're brave enough to push those boundaries, you can get great results. So we took a lot of chances and took a lot of risks. I was convinced that if we could recreate that 'General in a war room' feel, that big map feel, and be able to zoom into any part of it, we'd have something that worked."

And work it most certainly does. It's rare to see a game that blends new ideas with tried and true genre mechanics so effectively. If the single-player campaign lives up to the multi-player experience we had in Seattle, after its release in early 2007, *Supreme Commander* will be keeping gamers glued to their strategic maps for months to come.



■ Some units are amphibious, allowing massed seaborne assaults.

"SUPREME COMMANDER ISN'T BEING MADE BY PEOPLE IN A COMFORT ZONE, PANDERING TO A MARKET. THERE'S A DRIVE TO INNOVATE"

# DEVIL MAY CRY 4


The amazing Devil Bringer is shaping up to be something special.

## "HAVE YOU EVER DANCED WITH THE DEVIL BY THE PALE MOON LIGHT?"

**DETAILS**

**FORMAT:** PlayStation3
**ORIGIN:** Japan
**PUBLISHER:** Capcom
**DEVELOPER:** In-House
**RELEASE:** TBA '07
**GENRE:** Beat-'Em-Up
**PLAYERS:** 1

**CONCEPT**

A combo-heavy brawler that is as devilishly challenging as it is stylistically cool: one of the flagship franchises for 'New' Capcom.

PS3 **Curse you, Capcom. We were thinking about holding off on a PS3 until the price dropped, but having seen in-game footage of *DMC4*, we might have to cave.** We loved *DMC3* to bits and the thought of getting stuck into a super-powered update fills us with immeasurable giddiness – the sort that could see us fork out that £425 without protest. If *DMC4* was simply a next-gen rehash of the third game then we'd be a little more discouraged, but early play-tests from TGS suggest there are enough alterations here to get fans of the series foaming at the mouth with anticipation. Don't get us wrong, *DMC4* doesn't deviate far from the path of its predecessor. The wealth of moves at Dante's disposal made playing the third game an exercise in videogame self-expression as players had an almost limitless combination of attack strings at their disposal. So any changes have been carefully thought-out additions rather than needless reinventions.

The change that's sure to rock the boat but is actually a smart move for Capcom, is that Dante's been replaced by Nero, a young chap who belongs to an order of knights that worship Sparda – he also dislikes our previous *DMC* hero as he watched him murder his fellow knights. Thanks to the demo at TGS it's now known that Nero plays a little differently to Dante. Predictably, he has a sword (Red Queen) and wields a gun. Just one, mind, so he's likely to lose the ballistic grace Dante was blessed with, but he also has a third weapon at his disposal: his hell-powered arm known as the 'Devil Bringer'. As well as allowing Nero to unleash powerful mid-range attacks, the arm, as the name suggests, can be used to grab a far-off enemy and drag it toward him. Skilled players will exploit the technique to chain many strings of combos together during moments when a combo might have naturally come to an end. It also gives the player another weapon to swap between in order to obtain the best possible coolness grade. The Devil Bringer has been integrated into the *DMC3* moveset so well that it's no surprise Capcom originally intended to include it in the older game but found that PS2 wasn't powerful enough.

Speaking of power, it's worring that *DMC4*'s visuals aren't as awe-inspiring as you'd hope, at least in stills. While the game hardly matches the standard of *MGS4*, it's important to note that *MGS4* was only shown in video form, making its graphical prowess unproven till playable code arrives. Besides, where *DMC* falters in still imagery, it leaps to life in motion. The animation is superb – from the way Nero's coat flaps when he jumps and lunges to the hesitant tiptoe of approaching enemies.

HD lighting effects and more expansive levels round off the visual upgrade, but it's clear Capcom prefers to use PS3's raw power to improve playability rather than give your friends something to gawp at while you play. The Devil Bringer's grappling abilities, as well as Nero's habit of slamming enemies into walls, gets the next-gen muscle working in the interests of series fans who, after *DMC3*, are crying out for new ways to play a very old genre.

## RUMOUR MILL

**To date, Capcom has never referred to Nero as Nero Angelo. There are theories on how Nero fits into the story, but nothing's confirmed. A favoured idea is that Nero has something to do with Nelo Angelo, a boss from the first game. This boss was meant to be named Nero Angelo, but changed due to a translation error when the game came from Japan. This would lead to Nero being connected to Dante's twin Vergil as Nelo has always been thought of as the remains of the Vergil that was beaten at the end of *DMC3*. Of course, Nero might just be some guy with a sword. Capcom's not ready to divulge.**

## "NERO ONLY HAS ONE GUN SO HE'S LIKELY TO LOSE THE BALLISTIC GRACE DANTE WAS BLESSED WITH"




Meet *Devil May Cry's* new protagonist Nero.




## DEVELOPER PROFILE

What can be said about Capcom that isn't in the hearts and minds of gamers across the world? It is one of the few developers whose recent games are just as beloved as its classics. Almost everything it touches turns to gold and we love 'em for it.

## HISTORY

- **KILLER 7** 2005 [Multi]
- **VAMPIRE SAVIOR** 1997 [Arcade]
- **FINAL FIGHT** 1989 [Arcade]

Will Dante be playable or only appear as an NPC? Our fingers are crossed for the former.

## VIDEOGAMES MATHS

### CRY ME A RIVER

DEVIL MAY CRY × DEVIL MAY CRY 3 – DEVIL MAY CRY 2 = DEVIL MAY CRY 4

**"CONTINUING ITS LEGACY OF FAST-PACED ACTION, DMC4 PUSHES THE ENVELOPE EVEN FURTHER"**
*CAPCOM PRESS RELEASE*

It may not look next gen but wait until you see *DMC4* in motion.

# PROJECT HEROES



■ With that same highly stylised cel-shading, but a less controversial plot line, could *Project Heroes* be the killer title that *killer7* criminally wasn't?



"GRASSHOPPER HAS STARTED FROM SCRATCH ON PROJECT HEROES; ALL THE BETTER FOR GETTING ONE HUNDRED PER CENT FROM THE HARDWARE"

## WITH LOOKS LIKE THIS, WHO NEEDS BRAINS?

### DETAILS

**FORMAT:** Nintendo Wii
**ORIGIN:** Japan
**PUBLISHER:** TBA
**DEVELOPER:** Grasshopper
**RELEASE:** TBA
**GENRE:** Action
**PLAYERS:** TBA

### CONCEPT

■ Fight your way up the hit man hierarchy to become the undisputed champion. Eye-popping visuals and motion control lend a new dimension to proceedings.

**Speaking at a BAFTA event in London, Will Wright stated: "If you look at the history of art, about 400 years ago we basically got to the point of photo-realism.** After that, where do you go? This is kind of what the history of games has been up to this point – we've been fighting this graphics arms race, trying to make characters more realistic, more believable."

From there, art became concerned less with realism and more with abstraction; the knowledge of how to represent reality prompting artists to subvert their techniques. Whether a similar subversion occurs with videogames – and whether it extends beyond the visual into gameplay, as with the Wii – is far from certain, though *Project Heroes* should provide some interesting food for thought.

If the success of Grasshopper's previous effort, *killer7*, is anything to go by, *Project Heroes* will be keenly anticipated by many and just as vehemently dismissed. The innovative gameplay and distinct visual style were not to all tastes, and in cosmetic terms this game seems to have pushed those polarising boundaries further still.

*Project Heroes* will allow you to take control of a hit man and fight your competitors to become king of the city. Early designs suggest good variety in the characters, with one brandishing what looks exactly like a Lightsaber, and another with guns embedded in his arms, which present interesting opportunities with which to exploit the motion-control system. Grasshopper has also suggested that, in a bid to appeal to a wider audience, the game will not be as thematically controversial as *killer7*. Nor will it share many of the same hallmarks as its predecessor – taking place in a different time and setting, with entirely original characters, and running on a brand new engine. Grasshopper has started from scratch on *Project Heroes*; all the better for getting one hundred per cent from the new hardware.

Nintendo's console lacks the sheer, knuckle-whitening power of its competitors and couldn't hope to compete in the race for realism, but if that lack forces developers to think outside the box with visuals then it could turn into a key strength. Conversely, it's still unclear whether Wii has the capability to deal with large, complex stories as well as it does gameplay, and so *Project Heroes* may fall short for those expecting Grasshopper to deepen the narrative and expand on some of *killer7*'s themes. So long as there are motion-controlled Lightsabers, we'll be okay.




eMag

# NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 2



Guffed? You besmirch my honour. Have at thee sah.

"FIRST INSTINCT – DON'T MESS WITH A GOOD THING"
CHRIS AVELLONE, OBSIDIAN ENTERTAINMENT

With just a month to go, will the developer be able to sort out the endless problems?

## VIDEOGAMES MATHS

THAC0 = 9D20

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS – GEEK & CHIC + TAME & LAME = NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 2

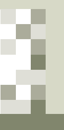


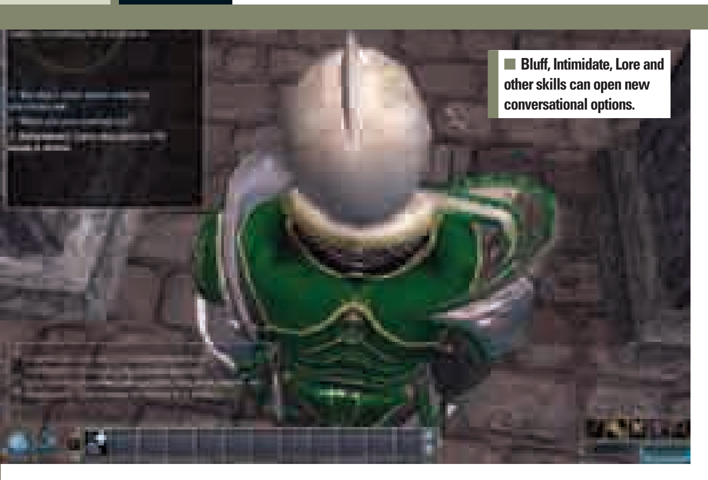
## DEVELOPER PROFILE

From the ashes of Interplay's Black Isle Studios rose Obsidian Entertainment. The majority of Obsidian's payroll is former Black Isle staff, laid off in 2003 amid the studio's financial difficulties. What they brought with them was a wealth of experience in RPG gaming from the seminal *Fallout* series and *Planescape: Torment*.

## HISTORY

STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC II 2004 [Xbox, PC]





Bluff, Intimidate, Lore and other skills can open new conversational options.



*NWN2* uses a dynamic day/night system to spectacular effect.

## PLEASE DON'T TAKE MY 20-SIDED DIE AWAY FROM ME

### DETAILS

**FORMAT:** PC
**ORIGIN:** US
**PUBLISHER:** Atari
**DEVELOPER:** Obsidian Entertainment
**RELEASE:** Out Now
**GENRE:** Role-Playing Game
**PLAYERS:** 1-4

### CONCEPT

Obsidian takes the *Dungeons & Dragons 3.5* die-rolling rule set and converts it into a huge interactive fantasy videogame. This is hardcore RPGing.

***Baldur's Gate* was the first in a long line of hardcore RPGs that took the entire, meticulously detailed core *Dungeons & Dragons* rule set and married it to a commercial videogame.** Considering *Baldur's Gate*'s origin is the archaic uber-geek domain of Eighties role-playing aficionados, it's a credit to BioWare's insight and production values that it found a gap in the market and gave the consumer an appetite for hardcore RPGs. The waning *D&D* boardgame industry was even revitalised by a surge of popularity that fed directly from fans of the videogame.

Since, BioWare has continued to rack up chart-topping titles with the rest of the *Baldur's Gate* series, *Neverwinter Nights* and a toe-twitchingly climactic *Knights Of The Old Republic*. It's one hell of a legacy for Obsidian to live up to, but having swept up the gauntlet thrown down by BioWare and creating the inconceivably more popular sequel to *KOTOR*, we should all look forward to a superbly polished and sublime successor to *NWN*. Shouldn't we, Obsidian…?

There's much anticipation among readers, so we'll cut to the chase: in its current state, *Neverwinter Nights 2* fails to stoke the flames of our enthusiasm – and we were huge fans of *NWN*. The fact is that with a month to go at the time of writing, there's a great deal still to do. At a superficial level, the visuals need polishing, automatic camera angles need adjusting and NPC voices need completing. Party AI is also dysfunctional and the game lags in places – even under the might of **games™**'s Alienware PC. This detracts from the experience on every level and a month isn't long, but we have faith that Obsidian and Atari will pull together to tie up these issues.

## "WE HAVE NAGGING DOUBTS AS TO ITS ORIGINALITY AND FRESH APPEAL"

Having tried to look past the immediate gameplay and performance issues that dog this current build, to seek the uncut diamond we'd hoped for, we were left with nagging doubts as to its originality and fresh appeal. There's a lot to be said for not fixing what isn't broken, especially when picking up an eagerly anticipated title with a fan base of highly specialised gamers. But there's nothing particular about *NWN2* to distinguish it from the original – and the resulting product is a lacklustre affair. Obsidian just seems to have rolled onto its haunches and used the material it's been given to build a mediocre variation of the same game.

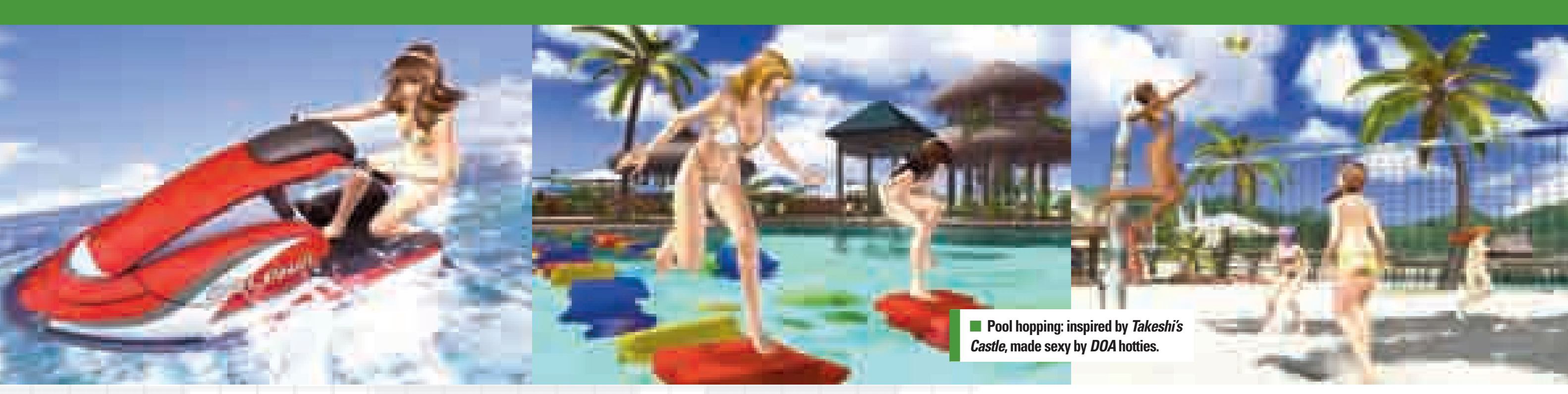
Furthermore, it's as if it's been clinically stripped down and streamlined: few houses can be entered in each town and rooms have less to discover than you'd expect. But the biggest sin of all is that dungeon crawling has become a bit of a chore. And all this to make it more accessible? If so, this misguided effort detracts from the ethos of *D&D* and thus, *NWN2*.

The niche that this *D&D* RPG occupied, that straddled a pencil line between geekdom and mainstream, that prided itself on being so utterly engrossing that you didn't care if your mates labelled you a 'sad git' suddenly feels trite. RPG fans are probably the most partisan of all gamers, but even their loyalty could be tested here if *NWN2* is released as it is, with or without bugs. We're holding our breath until October…

## STICKS AND STONES

Conversation plays a bigger role in *Neverwinter Nights 2* than in the first game. Obsidian has taken the same angle that it did for *KOTORII,* and conversation will have a heavy influence upon shifting your alignment. You'll frequently be given conversational options that range from saintly selflessness to callous despotism, and these options sometimes come hand in hand with appropriate actions. Choose a particular line of discourse that conflicts with your current alignment frequently enough and your alignment will change. This has a profound affect upon the interaction with your party members, and depending on whether they favour your alignment or not will determine whether they reveal useful information or even leave your party of their own accord.

# DEAD OR ALIVE: XTREME 2



Pool hopping: inspired by *Takeshi's Castle*, made sexy by *DOA* hotties.

## WE KNEW IT WASN'T REALLY ABOUT THE 'BEACH VOLLEYBALL'

**DETAILS**

**FORMAT:** Xbox 360
**ORIGIN:** Japan
**PUBLISHER:** Tecmo
**DEVELOPER:** Team Ninja
**RELEASE:** 31 December (Japan: 22 Nov/US: 15 Nov)
**GENRE:** Sport
**PLAYERS:** 1-2 (2 Online)

**CONCEPT**

The girls from Team Ninja's famous fighting series are brought together again for a second titillating beach sports title.

**It's unikely that the bored victor of *DOA3* would invite the buxom lassies he's kicked the crap out of onto his private island.** Despite the mesmerising attraction of their jiggly physics, Zack should have known that not only would the *DOA* babes be annoyed that he lied about hosting a new tournament, but also incensed at his flagrant display of sexism in extending the invite only to the girls from the tournament. Providing them with the bare minimum of clothing and expecting them to participate in a series of inane competitions that fall just short of nude mud wrestling, should have got Zack a few chipped teeth and a bloody nose. And that's just from Niki, his girlfriend.

As it turned out, the girls dropped their bloodthirsty Valkyrie personas and turned into dizzy, giggling bimbos embracing Zack's volleyball competition and pervy mini-games while Niki turned a blind eye. Spurred on by the lack of feminist outrage at his Hugh Hefner approach, Zack has done what any red-blooded male would in his position and invited them all back again, devising ever-more inventive ways of encouraging the girls to giggle and jiggle.

Similarly, Tecmo was encouraged by the sales of *Dead Or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball* and was under no illusion as to why the game sold so well, which is why Team Ninja is following it up with a sequel that appears to deliver even more eye-popping physics than before. It has also realised that no one was fooled into thinking that the original's title was anything other than a facade, and that's why the new game has received a more ambiguous name: *Dead Or Alive: Xtreme 2*.

Of course, the volleyball's in there… somewhere, but it takes as much of a backseat as before, whereas currying favour with the *DOA* lasses and charming them at the casino takes as much precedence as ever. *DOAX2* has expanded its mini-game selection with personal water craft (PWC) racing, rope pulling and the return of the popular pool hopping. But the **games™** favourite has to be the Butt Battle where a pair of the scantily clad goddesses brush cheeks on a small flotilla in an effort to knock each other into the pool. Genius.

We're not surprised that Team Ninja appears to have changed very little of the original formula, so if you're looking for an excuse to ogle some soft porn in front of the missus, *Dead Or Alive Xtreme 2* may be your answer.

> "CHARMING THE DEAD OR ALIVE LASSES AT THE CASINO TAKES AS MUCH PRECEDENCE AS EVER"



It's all about timing and an arse of J-Lo's proportions.



A sunbathing mini-game? No doubt you'll have to oil them down in *DOAX3*.


eMag

# METAL GEAR SOLID 4: GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS

■ Even with the onset of age, Snake still manages to keep his mullet beautiful.

**"THE PINNACLE OF DIGITAL ENTERTAINMENT COULD BE LOOKING US RIGHT IN THE EYE WITHOUT US EVEN KNOWING IT"**

**VIDEOGAMES MATHS**

**GEARING UP**

METAL GEAR SOLID 3 × URBAN CONFLICT + OCTOPUS = METAL GEAR SOLID 4



■ The new camouflage system will change *Metal Gear Solid* forever.



## DEVELOPER PROFILE

Kojima is one of the luminaries of videogame development. With a steely determination to constantly push the medium forward, his work always raises the bar for what is possible in a game, and leaves other development studios in the dust. *Metal Gear Solid 4* could be his finest work yet.

## HISTORY

- METAL GEAR SOLID 3 2003 [PlayStation2]
- METAL GEAR SOLID 2 2001 [PlayStation2]
- METAL GEAR SOLID 1998 [PlayStation2]



# TGS LIFTS THE LID ON SNAKE'S FINAL OUTING



"MGS4 BRINGS A TOTALLY NEW CONCEPT AND SITUATION, RESULTING IN THE TOUGHEST METAL GEAR INFILTRATION MISSION EVER DEVISED"

KONAMI PRESS RELEASE

PS3 **A brief scouting mission of the Internet's more excitable gaming forums is all it takes to realise the importance of the *Metal Gear* story to so many.** In a medium fascinated with the idea of 'growing up', it seems odd that a fan base would be so interested in discussing secondary matters such as plot developments or character cameos, when there is a wealth of fresh gameplay meat to get your teeth into. Still, with a series like *Metal Gear Solid*, it hardly comes as a surprise. After all, how many franchises even bother telling a story over consecutive instalments, let alone one with such an intricately woven tapestry of war, deceit, love and honour?

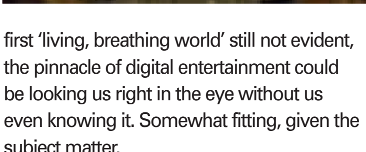
As undeniably fascinating and involving as *MGS*'s gloriously overblown parable is, the surfacing of new gameplay facets from this year's Tokyo Game Show has provided a far more enlightening clue as to the direction Kojima's *Metal Gear* finale will take. Instantly allaying fears that 'Nowhere to Hide' may have spelled the end of *Metal Gear*'s obsession with stealth, the sublime Octo-camo suit proves the natural evolution of *Snake Eater*'s innovative camouflage system. The suit is so called because of an octopus's ability to change its colour to blend in with its surroundings, the new suit not only matches tone and shade, but also pattern – memories of Snake's brick camouflage come flooding back. Now, you can hide anywhere, be it a two-toned wall or a rocky crater in the middle of a shelled-out street. Along with this ingenious new take on the 'sneaking suit', Snake has added to his considerable athletic repertoire with a move that mimics his ageing frame: playing dead. Players can now lie prone on the ground as unsuspecting enemy soldiers saunter by, only to snap into action and fire from the floor. Just another option in a world defined by choice.

Despite these new manoeuvres, there has been little evidence so far that *Metal Gear Solid 4* is a really next-gen experience. By current definitions, the next generation should provide something more than a simple increase in graphical fidelity be it the swarm tech of *Dead Rising* or the persistent world of *Oblivion*; and so far, *Metal Gear* has not displayed any obviously progressive flourish. Visually it cannot be faulted, the contempo-vérité stylings – washed out visuals, urban combat – blend with *MGS*'s familiar 'fantasy meets hyper reality' ethos to create something breathtaking. There's not been a better looking game, at least in terms of photorealism, but currently the feeling that it has not evolved from *Metal Gear Solid 3* cannot be escaped.

Kojima though, is a master of innovation, and it's almost guaranteed that *Metal Gear Solid 4* is yet to show its true colours. Everything shown so far has been jaw-dropping, and with early promises of the first 'living, breathing world' still not evident, the pinnacle of digital entertainment could be looking us right in the eye without us even knowing it. Somewhat fitting, given the subject matter.

So, when the time for playing is said and done, how will we remember *Metal Gear Solid 4*? Will it confound, confuse and contrive like *Sons Of Liberty*, or enthral and enrapture as *Snake Eater* managed with such apparent ease? Already the signifiers for the spectacular are evident – who is the young Snake lookalike at the end of the latest footage? Will Solid die? Do we even play the real Solid Snake? So many questions, so many possibilities. Now is Kojima's time to give the fans the answers. He simply must not disappoint.





Guns. Lots of guns. Even though there's only one gun.

## THE FOURTH WALL

It's no secret that Kojima's games and post modern tricks go hand in hand, but the appearance of a young Snake lookalike at the end of the trailer has sent *Metal*-heads into a frenzy. Obviously, with a story that has dealt with cloning and genetic engineering since day one, it shouldn't come as a huge surprise to see a character who looks the same as another, but the web of intrigue this appearance could signify only stirs the rumour pot more. No one is certain who he is, but we can confirm he is decked out in the same Octo-camo suit as Solid Snake, and certainly doesn't look like an ally.

## DETAILS

**FORMAT:** PlayStation3
**ORIGIN:** Japan
**PUBLISHER:** Konami
**DEVELOPER:** Kojima Productions
**RELEASE:** TBA
**GENRE:** Action
**PLAYERS:** TBA

## CONCEPT

The fourth and maybe final instalment in gaming's favourite saga. TGS has unveiled more on one of our most anticipated titles.

# GUITAR HERO II

## HANDS-ON WITH HARMONIX'S HARD-ROCKING SEQUEL

**DETAILS**

**FORMAT:** PlayStation2, Xbox 360
**ORIGIN:** US
**PUBLISHER:** Activision
**DEVELOPER:** Harmonix
**RELEASE:** 7 November [PS2], January 2007 [360]
**GENRE:** Rhythm-Action
**PLAYERS:** 1-2

**CONCEPT**

■ Heavy riffs, virtuoso solos and endless entertainment. It's the sequel to one of the greatest games of all time.

PS2 **There are few greater levellers in life than *Guitar Hero*.** It's impossible to maintain any sense of genuine cool when strapped to a Fisher Price plastic axe, and it's just as difficult not to unleash your inner guitar demon while you're there. Find us someone who doesn't enjoy Harmonix's finest, and we'll hang up our Cherry Gibsons for good.

*Guitar Hero II* is poised to turn the fun factor up to 11. Aware of the everlasting appeal of duelling rock, the two-player modes have been the development teams' point of focus for this most anticipated of sequels. Crucially, both players can now select their preferred difficulty levels, meaning novices can enjoy the musical company of their *Guitar Hero* superiors without suffering at the hands of an incomprehensible solo. In the game's sublime co-op mode, one player chooses bass and the other guitar (or in some cases rhythm and lead), and the two play in harmony. It's a thing of beauty – combining the wandering bass and triumphant electric wail of *Sweet Child Of Mine*'s euphoric intro is like a gaming epiphany – why on earth would you want to do anything else?

But when the time for friendship has ceased, *Guitar Hero*'s ferociously competitive face-off returns in improved form. Both axe-wielders now play the exact same notes, ensuring complete fairness in scoring and separating the Black Sabbaths from the Limp Bizkits – only rock gods need apply. The thrill of out-soloing an opponent is amplified considerably when both are noodling side by side; the elation of nailing that tricky hammer-on as your nemesis buckles under its pressure is immense.

The real star of *Guitar Hero* hides beneath the surface. Like a genius songwriter too shy to perform himself, the game's fundamentals are what make it so successful – the chord shapes it imitates, the perfect balance between difficulties, its ability to create sequences of lines and patterns that make players feel like Jimmy Page. Harmonix displayed its abilities with *Frequency* and *Amplitude*; it just took a small plastic guitar for the world to take notice.

Always keen to point out that it listens to its fan base – the decision to release the original in the UK being a perfect example – with *Guitar Hero II*, Harmonix is allowing players to switch to 'lefty flip' from the Pause menu, and more importantly, let flat-screen-TV owners calibrate any lag that may have spoiled their enjoyment of the first game. It really is shaping up to the be the ultimate party package: expanding on the near-immaculate original and ironing out every minor niggle.

Essentially, *Guitar Hero II* cannot fail. With a 360 version coming next year (wireless controllers, downloadable content, oh yes) and the PS2 set to be rocking heavily again this Christmas, Activision has clearly bought into a blue-chip product. By not toying with the formula too much – aside from some tasty three-finger chords – Harmonix has guaranteed success. This is a development studio on the rise; fully aware and understanding of its market, and positively brimming with talent, ambition and drive. If *Guitar Hero* turns out to be anything less than the greatest rhythm-action game of all time, then we'll just have to eat our guitars.

"THE THRILL OF OUT-SOLOING AN OPPONENT IS AMPLIFIED CONSIDERABLY WHEN BOTH ARE NOODLING SIDE BY SIDE"

■ Duelling guitars = good times. Just one of the simple facts of life.

■ There are new guitar heroes aplenty – we're fond of this chap's face.

**OFFICIAL TRACK LISTING**

- ***Carry On Wayward Son*** – Kansas
- ***John The Fisherman*** – Primus original master recording
- ***Psychobilly Freakout*** – Reverend Horton Heat
- ***Strutter*** – Kiss
- ***War Pigs*** – Black Sabbath
- ***Who Was in My Room Last Night?*** – Butthole Surfers
- ***You Really Got Me*** – Van Halen
- ***YYZ*** – Rush
- ***Madhouse*** – Anthrax
- ***Shout At The Devil*** – Mötley Crüe
- ***Trippin' On A Hole In A Paper Heart*** – Stone Temple Pilots
- ***Freebird*** – Lynard Skynard
- ***Sweet Child O' Mine*** – Guns N Roses
- ***Beast And The Harlot*** – Avenged Sevenfold
- ***Can't You Hear Me Knocking*** – Rolling Stones
- ***Crazy On You*** – Heart
- ***Heart Shaped Box*** – Nirvana
- ***Jessica*** – Allman Brothers
- ***Laid To Rest*** – Lamb Of God
- ***Message In A Bottle*** – The Police
- ***Misirlou*** – Dick Dale
- ***Surrender*** – Cheap Trick
- ***Tattooed Love Boys*** – The Pretenders
- ***Them Bones*** – Alice In Chains
- ***Tonight I'm Gonna Rock You Tonight*** – Spinal Tap
- ***Bad Reputation*** – Thin Lizzy
- ***Carry Me Home*** – Living End
- ***Freya*** – Sword
- ***Girlfriend*** – Matthew Sweet
- ***Hanger 18*** – Megadeth
- ***Institutionalized*** – Suicidal Tendencies
- ***Killing In The Name*** – Rage Against The Machine
- ***Last Child*** – Aerosmith
- ***Monkey Wrench*** – Foo Fighters
- ***Mother*** – Danzig
- ***Rock This Town*** – Stray Cats
- ***Search And Destroy*** – Iggy Pop And The Stooges
- ***Stop*** – Jane's Addiction
- ***Surrender*** – Cheap Trick
- ***Sweet Cherry Pie*** – Warrant
- ***Woman*** – Wolfmother

## DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Harmonix has always been a **games™** favourite, so it was with glee that we watched *Guitar Hero* rocket the Boston-based studio into the stratosphere. The firm is dedicated to its music, demonstrated in its impressive body of work including *Amplitude* and *Frequency*, and its consistently excellent soundtrack choices.

## HISTORY

- **GUITAR HERO** 2005 [PlayStation2]
- **AMPLITUDE** 2003 [PlayStation2]
- **FREQUENCY** 2001 [PlayStation2]

## VIDEOGAMES MATHS

**SCHOOL OF ROCK**

GUITAR HERO + BASS + CO-OP = GUITAR HERO II

**"GUITAR HERO II WILL BOAST ADDITIONAL MULTI-PLAYER MODES IN WHICH TWO GUITARISTS CAN PLAY LEAD AND RHYTHM OR BASS TRACKS SEPARATELY – FOR THE ULTIMATE BAND EXPERIENCE"**

*REDOCTANE PRESS RELEASE*



■ The patterns are now even more intuitive. And devilishly tough on Expert.



# GENJI: DAYS OF THE BLADE





Shizuka is a new addition to the series, and brandishes razor-sharp hoops as weapons.

"DURING THE GAME, YOU CAN SWITCH BETWEEN FOUR CHARACTERS, ALL OF WHOM HAVE THEIR OWN UNIQUE SKILLS"

## "LIVE BY THE SWORD, DIE BY THE SWORD"

### DETAILS

**FORMAT:** PlayStation3
**ORIGIN:** Japan
**PUBLISHER:** Sony
**DEVELOPER:** Game Republic
**RELEASE:** TBA
**GENRE:** Action
**PLAYERS:** TBA

### CONCEPT

Set three years after the events of the first game, guide Yoshitsune and friends to victory in the battle between the Genji and Heishi clans.

**Do we ever need two games doing the same job? On its original release, *Genji: Dawn Of The Samurai* was dismissed by many because, in a world where *Onimusha* existed, there seemed little reason to buy it.** Though this is perhaps a little unfair, it isn't uncommon – *Scarface*, for example, will inevitably suffer in comparison to the vastly superior *Vice City* – and while *Genji* has a rival doing the same thing to a higher standard, critical and public opinion will fall short. What better chance to redress the balance than taking the fight to a new battlefield – the next generation.

During the game, you can switch between four characters – of which we saw three – all of whom have their own unique skills. The samurai Yoshitsune and the huge club-wielding monk Benkei will be familiar to veterans of the original, but this time you have access to Shizuka, a female with hooped blades that she can use to maim, pull enemies toward her and reach areas the others cannot. Each character has their own unique skills and weapons, and we had great fun switching between them mid-attack to score multi-character combos.

The benefit of having different skill sets was highlighted by the first boss character – an enormous warrior with a weak spot on its back. Benkei was large enough but too slow to avoid the attacks, Shizuka had the speed but lacked in power, while Yoshitsune had just the right balance between athleticism and aggression to fell the beast. The control method is simple – one button to jump, three for attack – and really helps to accentuate the importance of choosing the right character in any given situation.

After collecting new weapons from a chest behind a waterfall, we proceeded along a path to a huge battleground, bathed in ominous red light. The enemies poured in around us, some walking, some flying, and we had to take down 20 of them in three minutes. Not a huge challenge, but with a significant number of NPCs on screen it made for quite a spectacle; the finished game, we were promised, will feature several epic set pieces. The demo concluded with a second boss, this time a splendid looking crab-beast with a skull for a face. It sounds every bit as strange as it looks too, and we hope to see this horrific imagination throughout the game.

The visuals were uniformly splendid, with a great use of colour to evoke mood, and the combat was clearly a step up from the original *Genji*. The power of PlayStation3 leaves Game Republic with all manner of opportunities to explore, and this short demo indicated that whatever superiority *Onimusha* had should certainly be put to the test.



PlayStation3 affords *Genji* some truly stunning visual tricks like these fire effects.


eMag

# FRONTLINES: FUEL OF WAR


Is this the future of military weapons technology? Kaos Studios seems to think so.

## NEXT-GEN WARFARE IS ABOUT TO GET A WHOLE LOT MORE 'KAOTIC'

### DETAILS

**FORMAT:** PC, Xbox 360, PlayStation3
**ORIGIN:** US
**PUBLISHER:** THQ
**DEVELOPER:** Kaos Studios
**RELEASE:** TBA
**GENRE:** First-Person Shooter
**PLAYERS:** 1-8

### CONCEPT

It's another FPS that features the colour green rather a lot. It's set in the future, but only just, and gives you a choice of missions, vehicles and guns.

PS3

**"*Frontlines: Fuel Of War* will take players to the next generation of combat. The game focuses on the cutting edge in military technology that will allow players to experience the highly charged frontlines of tomorrow, today," said Frank DeLise, general manager of Kaos Studios.** How does he know? Are we really supposed to believe that a suit from a newly formed videogame company has some sort of special insight into military weapon development? Of course not. Kaos Studios does not work in conjunction with the US military, it looks at the weapons soldiers are using today and has a guess at how they might be improved. There's nothing wrong with that; we'd just rather DeLise yakked about something worthwhile.

Take the game's non-linear structure: it's much more interesting than some pale comparison between a game and the future of warfare. From the off, despite your initial low rank, you are given a choice of missions, the success or failure of which shapes the course of the game. Non-linear design is fast becoming a fairly typical feature of next-gen games, but in the context of a war it should work fairly well, the constantly alternating objectives presumably giving a sense of size and progression that's lacking from many recent attempts in the genre.

The game's reason for war is less admirable but still worth discussion. Siding Europe and the US against Russia and China in a battle over the world's oil is hardly the most engaging concept. Cold War-inspired, West-versus-East shenanigans hasn't interested us since Rocky Balboa smacked Drago in the gob, but it's certainly preferable to have recognisable opposition over the faceless Middle-Eastern terrorists that seem to have plagued any game that featured a gun since 2001. Inevitably though, the game's backstory politics will boil down to an exchange of bullets and grenades making the limited thought that's gone into the setting fairly irrelevant anyway – it's why the FPS will never make a good home for political comment, and neither should it.

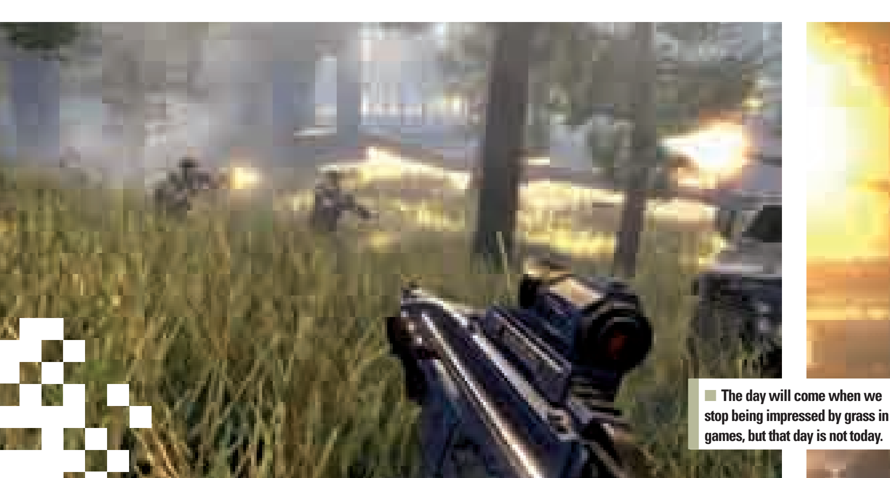
As each mission begins, you'll play a soldier who is part of a fire team and will be able to decide on both the basic weapon loadout and the role you will play in the mission, such as recon or assault. We're guessing that the latter element will act like a standard RPG character class and if that's the case, then it will be the first of a few role-playing elements. Another will be how your character's rank levels up throughout the game, unlocking new abilities such as being able to call down a bombing run.

The main draw here however, should be the combat. Extending from the non-linear story progression, battle will be a 'go anywhere, do anything' affair. Much like in *Battlefield 1942*, you will be able to go into battle on foot or in one of the many vehicles available – there are 60 all together – although whether or not this 'wild' quality will jar with any plans Kaos has for realism, we'll have to wait and see. The potential is here, but without a proper hands-on it's difficult to gauge the possibility of *Frontlines* fulfilling it. For the moment, we'll remain quietly optimistic.

**"MUCH LIKE IN BATTLEFIELD 1942, YOU WILL BE ABLE TO GO INTO BATTLE ON FOOT OR IN ONE OF THE MANY VEHICLES AVAILABLE"**

### FUTURE TOYS

**_Fuel Of War_ is set ever so slightly in the future, and so the weapons are that much better… or worse, depending how you view slaughter. For a start there's an improved Comanche attack helicopter, which should be fun to pilot, and there's something called an 'air-detonation' grenade which explodes mid-air. There will be scout drones that should be useful for checking out areas before you venture in, and, more interestingly, suicide runs but without the suicide (but drones don't live, and therefore can't die?).**


The day will come when we stop being impressed by grass in games, but that day is not today.



# FRONTLINES: FUEL OF WAR
PC/MULTIFORMAT



## DEVELOPER PROFILE

A division of THQ, Kaos Studios was formed in 2005 by experienced FPS developers. The main bulk of the team is made up of some of the creators of *Desert Combat* and *Battlefield 2*. *Frontlines: Fuel Of War* will be Kaos Studios' first release, and by the sounds of things it should be an okay one.

## HISTORY

FUEL OF WAR IS KAOS STUDIO'S FIRST GAME, SO THE DEVELOPER HAS NO BACK CATALOGUE OF SUCCESSES… OR FAILURES FOR THAT MATTER

There will be 60 vehicles to choose from in *Frontlines*, which is more than 59 but less than 61.

### VIDEOGAMES MATHS

ON THE WAR MATH

HAZE + CALL OF DUTY 2 ÷ BATTLEFIELD 1942 = FRONTLINES: FUEL OF WAR

"PLAYERS WILL BE ABLE TO USE MORE THAN 60 VEHICLES AND ADVANCED WEAPONRY FROM NEXT-GENERATION ASSAULT TANKS TO EXPERIMENTAL RC DRONES"

*FRANK DELISE, GENERAL MANAGER, KAOS STUDIOS*

*Frontlines* will feature some RPG elements but without any of the camp sidekicks and amnesiac heroes.

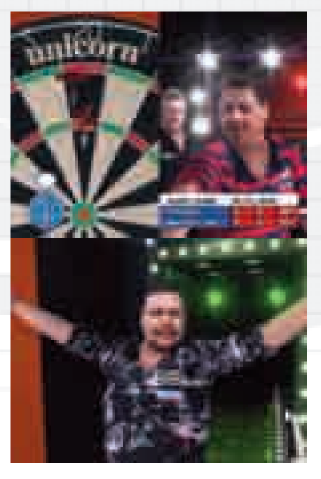
# SHOWCASE

MORE THINGS TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

## WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP DARTS

BULLY FOR YOU

Format: PlayStation2, PC
Origin: UK
Publisher: Oxygen Interactive
Developer: TBA
Genre: Sports
Players: 1-2



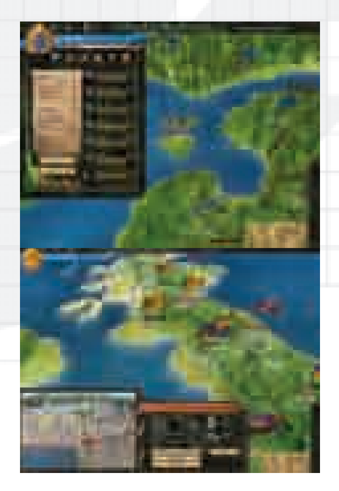
**To be honest, for as long as beer, pork scratchings and pubs exist, the traditional game of darts will never die – it just receded from its Eighties heyday somewhat.** Hot on the heels of a resurgence of interest in the UK's sport of pot-bellied athletes with tasteless shiny shirts however, comes Oxygen Interactive's *World Championship Darts*. It's a goody too, priding itself on a highly authentic television adaptation of the sport. It makes simple use of PlayStation2's analogue stick thumb control, inspired by the world-conquering *Tiger Woods PGA Tour* golf series, and is a thoroughly entertaining play. Everyone ought to love this one.

RELEASE: 01 DECEMBER

## EUROPA UNIVERSALIS III

HISTORY IS GOOD FOR GAMES

Format: PC
Origin: Sweden
Publisher: Paradox Interactive
Developer: In-House
Genre: Strategy
Players: 1



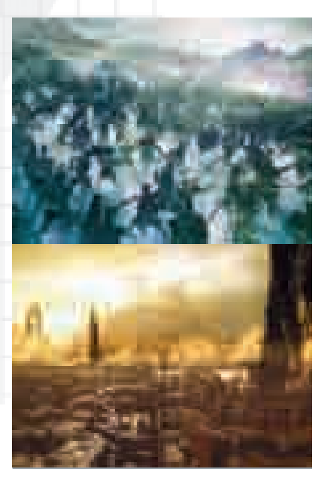
**2002 was the last occasion when we were gifted with a release from Paradox's *Europa Universalis* franchise, so this popular strategy game will be under significant pressure to perform come the release of *Europa Universalis III* next year.** *Europa* has a strong historical angle, set over the course of 300 years from the end of the Hundred Years War to Georgian times, and features historical monarchs and famous society figureheads of the time, such as Newton, Mozart and Descartes. *Europa Universalis* has a reputation for deeply tactical exploration, trade and warfare, and we're fully expecting the same of the third title in the series.

RELEASE: Q1 '07

## LOST ODYSSEY

THE CRYING GAME

Format: Xbox 360
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Mistwalker
Genre: Role-Playing Game
Players: 1



**Has a game ever made you cry? We admit Aeris dying in *Final Fantasy VII* was a bit of a tear jerker and *Ocarina Of Time* was so good that we almost wept upon completing it, but *Lost Odyssey*'s producer Hironobu Sakaguchi has promised us that we will cry when playing Mistwalker's forthcoming role-playing game.** Having drafted a good portion of the staff responsible for the *Final Fantasy* series and a renowned Japanese novelist onto the team, Sakaguchi may well have some weight to his claim. And considering the protagonist is a man doomed to live for a millennium watching loved ones live and die, the premise definitely lends itself to tragedy.

RELEASE: TBA '07

## FUZION FRENZY II

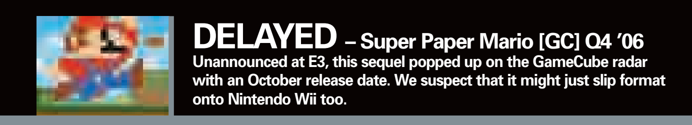
CHRISTMAS PARTY SEASON

Format: Xbox 360
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Hudson Soft
Genre: Party
Players: 1-4

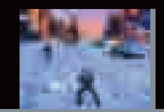


**At long last, the sequel to one of games™'s favourite Xbox party games nears completion for its release on Xbox 360 around the holiday period.** With the brains behind the classic *Bomberman* games developing this title, we're definitely going to see far more than a next-generation facelift for this beauty. In addition to the standard *Fuzion Frenzy* fare of frenetic and highly competitive mini-games, one of the more intriguing new features is the option of tailoring games to your own taste, creating new games that can be shared on Xbox Live. It's the best reason ever for leaving your sad hermitage and making some friends in time for Christmas.

RELEASE: CHRISTMAS



**DELAYED – Super Paper Mario [GC] Q4 '06**
Unannounced at E3, this sequel popped up on the GameCube radar with an October release date. We suspect that it might just slip format onto Nintendo Wii too.

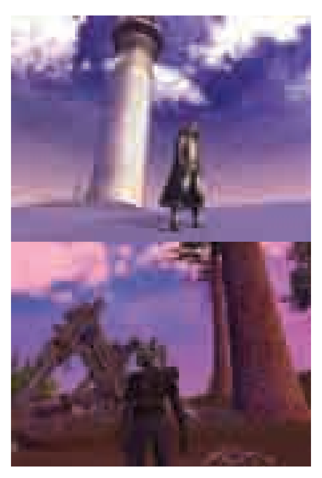


**DELAYED – Crackdown [Xbox 360] Q1 '07**
*Crackdown*, the crime-fighting urban action title from Scottish developer Real Time Worlds, which was scheduled to come out at the end of the year has now fallen back to a vague spring 2007 release.

## VANGUARD: SAGA OF HEROES

FOREVER QUESTING

| | |
|---|---|
| Format: | PC |
| Origin: | US |
| Publisher: | Microsoft |
| Developer: | Sigil Games |
| Genre: | MMORPG |
| Players: | Massively Multi-Player |



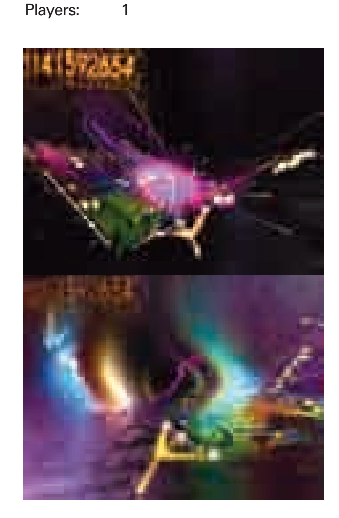
**It's hard to imagine Brad McQuaid making a comeback with a game that would top *EverQuest*, following the winding down of the giant MMORPG and McQuaid jumping off the SOE bandwagon.** That's apparently not going to stop him trying though, as his latest project by his development studio Sigil Games includes members from the former *EverQuest* team, and is nearing completion. *Vanguard: Saga Of Heroes* takes place in Telos and features the same high-fantasy theme, the new Unreal engine and 'the next logical evolution of MMORPG gameplay'. It will be interesting to see whether this will be enough to knock *World Of Warcraft* off its pedestal.

RELEASE: CHRISTMAS

## SPACE GIRAFFE

A GIRAFFE. IN SPACE. SHOOTING.

| | |
|---|---|
| Format: | Xbox Live Arcade |
| Origin: | UK |
| Publisher: | Microsoft |
| Developer: | Llamasoft |
| Genre: | Shoot-'Em-Up |
| Players: | 1 |



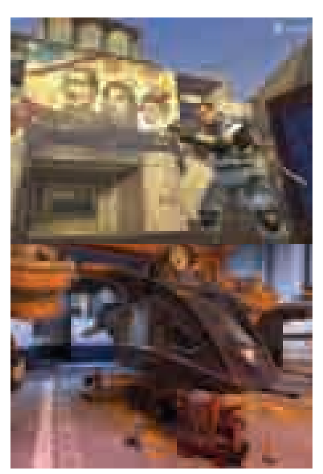
**"Congratulation! You is winner! But our giraffes is in the next house!"** That is the obscure and grammatically mangled end-of-level message you'll receive in Jeff Minter's latest addition to Xbox Live Arcade, *Space Giraffe*. It's a psychedelic shoot-'em-up with more than just a touch of the bizarre and conceptual about it, though probably more straightforward and accessible than *Every Extend Extra* on PlayStation Portable. Pitched as Minter's *Tempest 2000/3000* sequel, the mesmerising array of colour and sound should be enough to hook your attention, let alone the obvious competitive element provided by Xbox Live.

RELEASE: TBA '07

## SHADOWRUN

WHEN OS'S CLASH

| | |
|---|---|
| Format: | Xbox 360, PC |
| Origin: | US |
| Publisher: | Microsoft |
| Developer: | In-House |
| Genre: | First-Person Shooter |
| Players: | 1-16 |



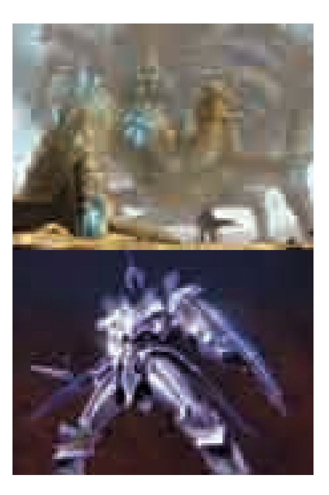
**The idea of fusing magic and science-fiction themes in role-playing games is not an original idea, but Microsoft Game Studios is bringing the concept to its new FPS, *Shadowrun*.** It's based on the RPG franchise and for the first time Windows Vista PC and 360 owners can compete with or against each other. It features two warring factions: the RNA (Ribonucleic Acid?), the technological mega corporation striving to tame magic for its own pocket, and the Lineage, who aim to keep it 'wild and free at all costs'. Ironic then, that Microsoft should be developing this title, as the plot sounds like a big metaphor for the Microsoft Windows versus RedHat Linux scenario.

RELEASE: TBA

## WHITE KNIGHT STORY

IT'S GONNA BE HUGE

| | |
|---|---|
| Format: | PlayStation3 |
| Origin: | Japan |
| Publisher: | Sony |
| Developer: | Level 5 |
| Genre: | Role-Playing Game |
| Players: | 1 |



**The small taster we've had of this PlayStation3 project by the same guys who made *Dragon Quest VIII* is enough to get us ever so slightly excited.** On paper, *White Knight Story* sounds like your typical RPG: a team of kids are adventuring through a fell-beast infested land, when one kid finds an artefact that allows him to transform into a seven meter tall white knight. Not exactly inspiring stuff in itself, but PS3's mighty technology lends awesome scope to this title. Those who saw the demo aired exclusively at TGS reported incredibly realistic battle effects and creatures whose proportions dwarf even the colossi of *Shadow Of The Colossus*. Now, that's big.

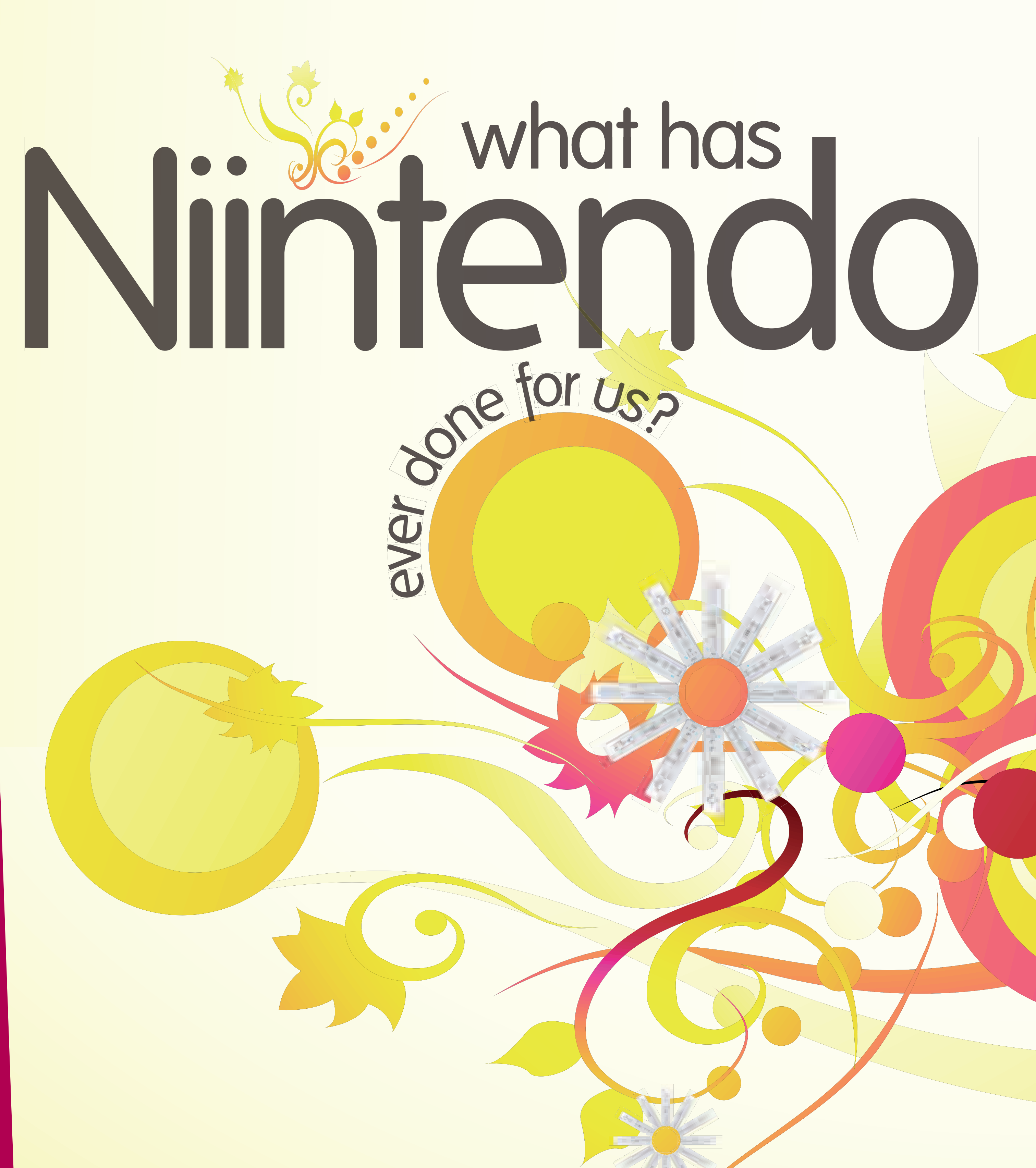
RELEASE: TBA '07


toejam is a wiener




'What's that rolling over ToeJam? Is it a hamster?' **ToeJam & Earl, Mega Drive [Sega] 1992**

# what has Niintendo ever done for us?





With its latest console just around the corner, whether you're a fan or not, there's no denying Nintendo's significance to the videogame world. In this special feature, games™ looks back at the best – and worst – of this universally loved company...

WORDS: **CHRIS SCHILLING**

**PLAYING ON THE** Nintendo Wii for the first time is innevitably going to be quite an alien experience for many gamers. At first it feels clumsy, almost unnatural. After ten minutes things start to feel a little bit more comfortable. Within an hour however, you'll be leaping around, swinging the controller and nunchuk attachment with abandon, and a broad grin spreads across your face. It's very refreshing, very different, very Nintendo.

In many ways, Wii is the ultimate Nintendo console – as well as playing host to a number of uniquely controlled 'new-generation' titles, it's compatible with GameCube discs, and the highlights of Nintendo's vast home console output will be available to purchase for Wii's Virtual Console. And so it's high time that **games™** took a look at the impact that this industry giant has had on videogames. We asked our forum the question 'what does Nintendo mean to you?' and got some interesting responses…

## A DIFFERENT DRUM

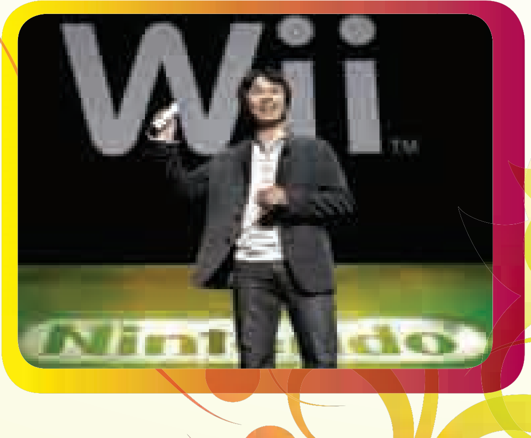
**TwinHype:** Nintendo means

***"We play our own game"***

This answer came up more than once. It's a description that fits both DS and Wii to a tee – Nintendo has frequently reiterated that gaming has to go beyond mere incremental increases in graphical fidelity, and its two most recent console releases are both perfect examples of this ethos. With the success of DS – particularly in Japan, though it's doing remarkably brisk business worldwide – it's hard to recall the time when it was considered a poor relation to PSP. It was a widely held opinion that the DS was a mere stopgap until the release of the next true Game Boy, while analysts predicted that Nintendo's dominance of the handheld industry would be a thing of the past. While the PSP has easily been the most successful competitor to a Nintendo portable console, the fact that DS still holds a significant lead over its technically superior rival is testament to Nintendo's understanding of the market. Nintendo is clearly hoping that Wii will have a similar impact, favouring the current mantra of 'new ways to play games' rather than being a significant graphical leap from the previous generation. It remains to be seen whether people will embrace technically inferior titles on their widescreen HDTVs, where graphics might be seen to be more important, but there's no doubting that Wii offers something significantly different from both 360 and PS3 despite Sony's new motion-sensitive controller stealing a little of its thunder – as well as the idea, some might slyly suggest.

It's not just with the consoles that Nintendo tries to approach things differently. While Reggie Fils-Aime recently made a point of saying, "The fact is there will be M-rated content on the Wii console. We want every single best selling game to be available on Wii – whatever that content is", it certainly hasn't been Nintendo's way in the past. To a degree, it was somewhat to the company's detriment during the last generation as Mature multiformat games generally meant PS2 and Xbox-only, while the likes of *Eternal Darkness, Resident Evil 4 and killer7* were the exception rather than the rule – and the latter two, despite a period of exclusivity, eventually made it to Sony's console anyway. Meanwhile, Nintendo was using *Mario* more than ever, while nearly all first-party games were prime exponents of 'blue-sky gaming'. It's a great shame more gamers can't see past the colourful exterior and realise that there's nothing 'kiddie' about a game having colourful graphics and relatively simple controls – Nintendo has always considered itself a family company – indeed the name of the original NES, Famicom, is an amalgam of the words 'family' and 'computer'. Despite the likes of the more 'mature' *Metroid Corruption* and *Project Hammer* being prominently displayed at E3 this year, it's doubtful that Wii will see a seismic shift in tack for first-party titles. With the likes of *Mario* and *Wario* making further appearances, and the previews of forthcoming Nintendo games showing a great deal more colour than their rivals, there won't be too many murky shots of heavily armed space marines.






■ Nintendo's conferences are real events in the gaming calendar, something all gamers – not just Nintendo fans – can look forward to.



Another example of Nintendo doing things differently is its public appearances, most notably at the E3 conferences – if there's anything outside the actual games that sums up the Nintendo difference, it's here. While Sony, and more recently Microsoft demonstrate their games with efficiency and professionalism – giant enemy crabs notwithstanding – with Nintendo it's all about showmanship. Cynics might argue that it's an exercise in deflecting attention from substandard product, but it's really all about a company that thrives when it's not taking itself seriously. From Miyamoto appearing dressed as Zelda in 2004 to this year's orchestra conducting and onstage tennis match, these conferences have been perfect exhibitions of Nintendo's playful side – something which is amply displayed in the exuberance of much of its software.

## FUN FACTOR

**toneeblair:** ***"A sense of unadulterated fun, adventure and innovation that's lacking in the approach of other companies. If Nintendo was a person, it'd be Shigeru Miyamoto – he carries himself like the wacky friend we all have who makes sure everyone has fun in even the most serious of situations"***

If there's one word that people associate with Nintendo more than any other then it's 'fun'. Of all the answers given to our question, the 'f' word that isn't affected by swear filters is the one that cropped up the most. While it's impossible to argue that games by other companies aren't fun – and we're certainly not about to do that here – there's something about first-party Nintendo games that just have that innocent sense of sheer playfulness about them. Nintendo titles bring out the inner child in all of us, with their bright, colourful characters, their simplistic yet enjoyable stories, and their wonderfully intuitive gameplay. There's rarely a Nintendo game that feels laborious to complete… if you ignore the likes of *Wind Waker's* tiresome Triforce quest, or the occasionally irritating cheating AI opponents in the *Mario Kart* games. Even when you do get frustrated, there's always something that pulls you back – so many Nintendo games have that 'just one more go' factor, and there's always that bit of magic to keep you hooked. Nintendo doesn't believe in withholding rewards, and whether it be a sparkling line of dialogue, a fantastic unlockable, or just another level of design genius to make you smile, it's always worthwhile to keep playing. It's the fun factor, and there's so many Nintendo games that have it in abundance, it'd take all day to list them here.



*Mario Kart* on SNES – look up the definition of 'fun' in the dictionary, and you'll find this picture. For many, still the best *MK* game to date, and the most successful *Mario* spin-off.

## DESIGN FOR LIFE

**Darkglobe80:** Nintendo means ***"Fun games, timeless design, sturdy hardware and fantastic controls"***

If there's one thing that even other game designers acknowledge as Nintendo's greatest strength, it's in the design of its games. *Super Mario*



# Nintendo TIMELINE

For those who need to brush up on their Nintendo history, here's a list of key moments through time…

**23 September 1889**
Nintendo founded in Kyoto, Japan. It produced Hanafuda playing cards.

**1977**
Nintendo starts creating its own home console units after two years of acting as the Japanese distributor for the oddly named Magnavox Odyssey.

**1981**
Shigeru Miyamoto's *Donkey Kong* released for arcades and three home systems.

**1983**
Famicom console launched in Japan. Half a million units sold within first two months of release.

**1985**
Hiroshi Yamauchi splits Nintendo into three research and development groups to increase productivity and software quality. *Super Mario Bros* is released to much acclaim and huge sales.



**1986**
Famicom reaches America under the Nintendo Entertainment System brand name. *Metroid* is released in Japan.

**1989**
Game Boy released with *Tetris* to huge sales. *Super Mario Land* also sells amazingly well.

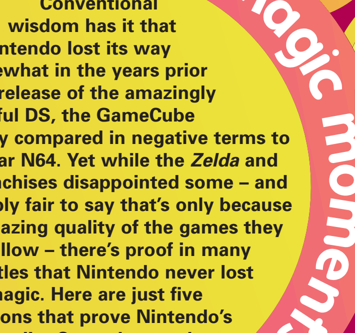


**1990**
Super Famicom launched in Japan, selling out within just three days.

**1991**
Super NES (or SNES) released in the US. Console war with Sega starts in earnest, the Genesis taking much of Nintendo's market share.

# Magic moments

Conventional wisdom has it that Nintendo lost its way somewhat in the years prior to the release of the amazingly successful DS, the GameCube frequently compared in negative terms to the popular N64. Yet while the *Zelda* and *Mario* franchises disappointed some – and it's probably fair to say that's only because of the amazing quality of the games they had to follow – there's proof in many other titles that Nintendo never lost that magic. Here are just five reasons that prove Nintendo's Quality Control meter has never wavered...





## 5 JUMP FOR JOY



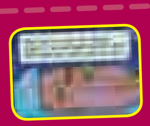
Aside from the beautiful visuals, and palm-blisteringly visceral enemy-pummelling, one standout moment sums up the fun of *Donkey Kong: Jungle Beat*. In the underwater stage of Pineapple Kingdom, Kong meets a friendly killer whale, and the ensuing rush through the final stages, topped by a leap from the water onto the giant fruit marking the end of the stage is sheer joy.

## 4 DRIFTING AWAY



Nintendo and Retro Studios managed the impossible and made a 3D update of *Metroid* that didn't embarrass its predecessors. In a jaw-dropping moment almost equal to the first time Link set foot onto Hyrule Field in *Ocarina Of Time*, Samus stepping out into the frozen wastelands of Phendrana Drifts as snow gently falls into a gigantic arena is a thing of ethereal beauty.

## 3 FAWFULLY GOOD



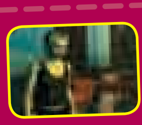
*Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga*'s irreverent humour made it a standout GBA title. A madcap opening sees Toad faint at the sight of Mario in his pants, the pinnacle reached whenever evil sidekick Fawful appears. Speaking in badly translated English, exclamations involving "the mustard of your doom" and the catchphrase "I have fury" made him an instant fan-favourite.

## 2 LINKED UP



*The Legend Of Zelda: Four Swords Adventures* is some of the best fun you can have fully clothed – with a clever, involving single-player mode to boot. The sight of four Links running around the screen, stabbing and setting each other on fire, and gamers throwing other players into water or off cliffs is one that more should experience. It's such a shame it was largely ignored.

## 1 FEAR FACTOR



One of Nintendo's biggest surprises, *Eternal Darkness* is right up there with the genre's finest. Its USP was the sanity effects – a series of graphical or gameplay-altering moments ranging from the playful to the terror inducing – the game telling you your joypad is unplugged, for example. Examining the bathtub is a moment that makes you wish you'd worn brown trousers.

■ A modern example of Nintendo design genius. The settings were based on digitised photographs of Miyamoto's own garden.

*World* is perhaps the epitome of this – with 96 amazing levels, all created so lovingly, each one an intricate web of ideas and secrets, woven together into perhaps the most wholly satisfying 2D platformer ever made. But that's slightly too obvious an example. To choose something a little more obscure, take *Pikmin 2*. A surprise inclusion? Perhaps, but then *Pikmin 2* – maybe more than any Nintendo game of the last five years – epitomises the Nintendo ethos. It creates a sense of wonder through the hugely varied and brilliantly realised flora and fauna – which can all be interacted with in the wonderfully funny and educational 'Piklopedia'. It evokes the childlike feeling of discovery through the immaculately layered stages, with the traditional Nintendo design ethic of exploration gradually opening up more and more areas. Each new underground dungeon, or newly reached area provides a wealth of new content, whether it be more collectables, brand new enemies, or just more stunningly realised arboreal settings.

That's just one example, but there are countless others – many of them following this simple line of showing a player something, but leaving it tantalisingly out of reach. It's a carrot dangled in front of the player's nose, willing him or her to carry on playing to reach this new area or level. Nintendo games positively encourage creative experimentation – remember the first time you found that warp pipe in *Super Mario Bros*? Or the thrill of sequence breaking in the 2D *Metroids*? Or where you saw that forest in *Ocarina* that just begged to be explored? That's classic game design for you.

## MISTAKES AND REGRETS

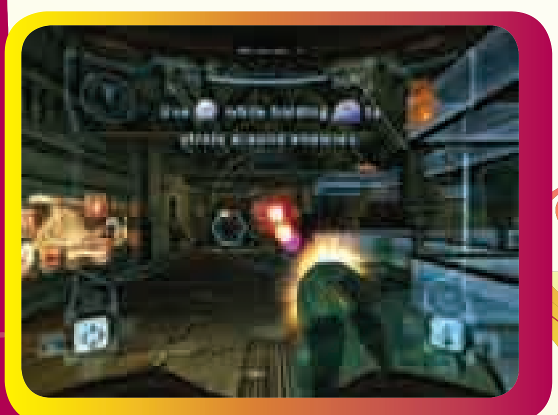
**Smurph:** Nintendo means ***"We don't like Europe"***
**Somerset Bumpkin:** And ***"Do we have to bother making PAL versions?"***

It's not all sweetness and light in the world of Nintendo though, and it wouldn't be fair if **games™** were to ignore the little foibles and frustrations that infuriate us all at times. While things have improved slightly of late, there are often still horrendous localisation delays for PAL releases, and some games we don't see at all – we've been promised *WarioWare: Twisted!* for aeons now, and we'll probably never get the likes of Japanese-only RPG *Giftpia* or the wonderfully weird *Rhythm Tengoku* (reviewed last issue). While importing can ease some of the pain, it's far from the ideal solution, and it's not something that many gamers are particularly savvy about. Nintendo has promised to improve the situation in the past, but far too often Europe gets the raw end of the deal, receiving the big games last while the quirkier titles don't get localised full stop.

Its steadfast and often stubborn refusal to play by the rules has led the firm into trouble in the past. Its biggest oops was when it reneged on its contract with Sony to develop a CD add-on for the SNES – which went on to become the PlayStation – and somehow ended up with the much adored N64 that sold 30 million units, a flop compared to PS2's perplexingly large shipping figures. It was Nintendo's arrogance at the time that cost it third-party support, with developers citing expensive development costs for the cartridge format and little assistance from Nintendo as reasons for switching to Sony.

Another area where Nintendo has fallen down in the past is marketing. While for DS this has been stepped up in recent times, Sony's expertise in the PR department no doubt helped

■ Metroid had perhaps the most fiendish and intelligent level design of the 8-bit era, and a magnificently eerie and sparse musical score.



increase its advantage over the steadily declining Nintendo during the N64 era, and Nintendo didn't learn its lesson during GameCube's life until it was too late. With third-party titles dwindling in numbers, there's a remarkable contrast in fortunes between the still healthy PlayStation and the moribund Cube, and, lest we forget, the Sony console was released much earlier.

If there's one other thing that irks gamers about Nintendo, it's



■ Skip's stunning *Giftpia* – a quirky *Animal Crossing*/RPG hybrid with amazing graphics. Much desired but never released in the West.

## "ITS STEADFAST **REFUSAL** TO **PLAY BY THE RULES** HAS LED **NINTENDO INTO TROUBLE** IN THE PAST"

the near-constant recycling of IPs. While it's understandable to a degree – familiar characters are likely to attract more people to new franchises – it's a shame that the *Mario* brand for one has been diluted by his appearance in several substandard products. It's one thing to use a recognisable brand to create interest in something different, quite another when that brand is the only possible reason people could have for purchasing the game. While there aren't too many Nintendo titles you could say that about, the *Mario Party* series, to name one, has become incredibly stale, with only very slight cosmetic alterations to each addition to the franchise, and the same old gameplay being used time and time again. Be honest, how many of you could tell the difference between a mini-game or a board from *Mario Party 5* and one from number *7*? Only the hardest of the hardcore could, and even they might struggle. It'd be nice if Nintendo had a little more faith in its core fan base, and treated us to some interesting new games with brand new characters more often.

### N-OVATION

**skull_leader:** Nintendo is ***"The driving and innovative force behind videogames"***

**redleader28:** Nintendo means ***"Originality"***

**SlyEnemy:** Nintendo ***"Pushes innovation like there ain't no yesterday"***

What other software company has created a game where you control a giant ape with a pair of novelty plastic bongos? Who but Nintendo would have you taking charge of an army of subservient plant-people? Or, for that matter, who would have you controlling a portly Italian plumber to jump on turtles' heads to rescue a princess? Innovation is yet another of Nintendo's watchwords, and it's always been at the forefront of original thought in videogaming. **games™** is fully aware that Nintendo isn't responsible for many of the innovations it's credited for – the analogue stick was used on PC games way before N64, and touch screen controls have been used for games prior to DS – but there's no doubt that Nintendo's oft-repeated idea of "new ways to play games" is no fallacy. Frequently, where Nintendo hasn't directly innovated, it has refined an existing design so well that it almost deserves more credit than the original creator.

More than in any other area, it's been in the field of control that Nintendo has rightly received acclaim. From the classic D-pad, which is still being improved, with the Game Boy Micro arguably the finest example yet; through the N64's analogue control, whose subtlety made the PlayStation's digital input feel almost archaic; to the touch screen input of DS used to superb effect in the likes of *Ossu!*

## Nintendo Timeline cont…

**1995**
Virtual Boy is released, and immediately becomes one of Nintendo's biggest failures. Nintendo purchases part of Rareware – a much more successful decision. Sony announces PlayStation after Nintendo had previously reneged on a deal for a CD add-on for the SNES.

**1996**
Nintendo 64 released in Japan (selling half a million units on release day) and later the US to further success, initially at least. *Pokémon* is released in Japan, and becomes one of Nintendo's most popular titles to date. PlayStation eats into Nintendo's market share through marketing and a dearth of new N64 games, setting up a wave of Sony dominance that remains (in the home console business at least) to this day.



**2001**
Game Boy Advance released worldwide. GameCube released in Japan.

**2002**
GameCube released in Europe. Yamauchi is replaced by Satoru Iwata as Nintendo president. Nintendo fined 18 million Euros for price-fixing practices going back to the Nineties.

**2004**
Nintendo DS released in Japan, quickly becoming a massive success replicated to a lesser degree in Europe and the US the following year.

**8 December 2006**
Nintendo Wii released in Europe – excited yet? We certainly are…



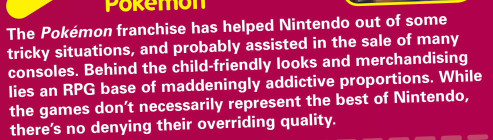


# Ninten-defined

When you hear the word 'Nintendo', what is it that you immediately think of? And just what exactly IS the 'Nintendo difference'? If you had to narrow it down to a handful of examples, here's what games™ thinks defines the company:



## 5 Pokémon



The *Pokémon* franchise has helped Nintendo out of some tricky situations, and probably assisted in the sale of many consoles. Behind the child-friendly looks and merchandising lies an RPG base of maddeningly addictive proportions. While the games don't necessarily represent the best of Nintendo, there's no denying their overriding quality.



## 4 Tetris



If there's one game you immediately link to Game Boy, it's *Tetris*. It remains one of the company's biggest success stories. It's the defining version of the game, which is odd as it's a monochromatic example of a title you'd think had to be played in colour. Even non-gamers wanted in on this mercilessly compulsive phenomenon.



## 3 WarioWare



It's twitch gaming at its finest, relying on pure spontaneity of action. The initial confusion at being instructed to 'jump', 'bounce' and 'avoid' turns to intense concentration and then laughter at the ridiculousness of it all. That last laugh is one you'll get back though – every new *WarioWare* title includes a number of mini-games to put you off the task in hand.

## 2 The SNES era



Some might argue that the N64 enjoyed the real golden period of Nintendo development, but it was the SNES that had a seemingly unbroken run of classics including the finest 2D games ever created. The never bettered platforming giant *Super Mario World*, and the epic *Zelda* masterpiece, *Link To The Past*. It's goosebump-inducing, tear-to-the-eye stuff.



## 1 Super Mario 64



This was not only a majestic, awe-inspiring piece of software, it also heralded a new era of 3D gaming. *Mario 64* is the main reason Nintendo 64 is so fondly remembered, giving the player a digital playground of unrivalled freedom, and inviting them to simply enjoy clambering and bouncing around it to their heart's content.

■ While Nintendo's key innovations have been in hardware, original IPs such as the majestic *Pilotwings* have had a huge influence on later titles.

*Tatakae! Ouendan* and *Trauma Center: Under The Knife*. It's no accident that those two examples aren't first-party titles with DS technology encouraging creativity in development for third-parties too. It's something that's likely to be a prominent factor in Wii titles too: with a 'Wiimake' of *Trauma Center* due for launch, Atlus has promised the use of the controllers being used as defibrillators, which is the sort of thinking outside the box for which Nintendo is so famed.

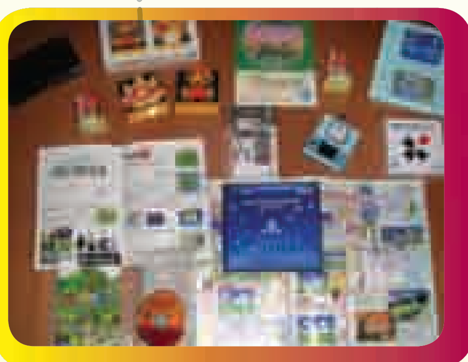
## FAN POWER

**nikgames:** ***"Some gamers believe Nintendo is the most holy and sacred game company"***
**Rotek:** ***"Nintendo got me into gaming, which means that it's a kind of 'father' to me"***

Sure, Sony and Microsoft have fans. Many are loyal, outspoken, and downright argumentative, but it's Nintendo that has the largest and most vocal fan base. They sometimes accept their idiosyncrasies without question, but often flying in the face of popular opinion – appraising *Odama* as an underrated classic, for example. The Nintendo fanboy or fangirl is often a figure of much forum mickey-taking, particularly when they refuse to acknowledge anyone who dares refer to their beloved company as 'The Big N' or 'Ninty', and considers it blasphemous to refer to the great Shigeru Miyamoto as 'Shigsy'. Yet most Nintendo fans are simply passionate gamers who prefer the Nintendo approach to game creation. Whether extolling the virtues of Kenji Yamamoto's *Super Metroid* music, or arguing among themselves to determine if *Majora's Mask* really is better than *Ocarina Of Time*, you'll rarely find gamers so enthusiastic and knowledgeable.

It's been Nintendo's intention to appeal to a much larger audience of late – casting its net wider to take in older gamers with the likes of *Brain Training*, and targeting female gamers with the marketing for *Nintendogs* and *Animal Crossing*. Some are concerned about Nintendo concentrating on other demographics at the expense of its loyal fan base, but it's clear that from the titles already announced, Wii will sate the hardcore while offering enough to entice the more casual gamer. From our forum responses, it's notable that some mentioned the accessibility of Nintendo's recent output, and there are signs that DS is bringing new gamers into the fold. PlayStation paved the way in this regard, expanding the user base significantly while maintaining appeal to existing gaming enthusiasts, but Nintendo is hoping to take it one step further with DS and Wii.

And so we come full circle. As we said at the outset, in many ways Wii is the ultimate Nintendo console. Fitting just about every category, it's a risk-taking enterprise which only Nintendo would attempt, and only Nintendo could pull off. With such an incredible history behind it though – and there are plenty of games and amazing moments we've barely been able to touch upon, even over eight pages – it's hard to bet against it coming up with the goods again. At best, Nintendo is awe inspiring and magical, with almost no creative equal. At worst, it's a company that's frustrating, divisive, stubborn and obtuse. But without Nintendo, the videogame industry would be a much duller place. As Disco-Rob from the **games™** forum puts it: "Nintendo means more to me than a chip dinner." We couldn't have put it better ourselves.



■ No true Nintendo fan's collection would be complete without some rare titles and random oddities from the home of videogames.



# An interview with... David Yarnton

With Wii on the horizon, games™ caught up with David Yarnton, Nintendo UK general manager to discuss his thoughts as the innovation experts herald a new era of gaming...

**games™: You've been with the company for a number of years now – what do you feel has been Nintendo's greatest achievement during your time there?**
**David Yarnton:** Constant innovation and the willingness to try new ideas is something that, as a part of Nintendo I am very proud of. However, I think that one of the major turning points for videogaming was Nintendo 64 when we brought in three-dimensional gaming, *Mario 64* was a real highlight and showed what was possible. I'm confident that Wii will emerge as one of our greatest achievements – not just as Nintendo but for the industry overall.

**g™: Do you have a favourite Nintendo game or franchise, and what is it that you particularly love about it?**
**DY:** Going back to the N64, my favourite was *GoldenEye*; I don't think subsequent FPS titles have ever matched it. I am, however, a bit of an *Advance Wars* fan as I see it as a more complicated and exciting form of chess. A lot of people in the office laugh when they ask what I'm playing on my DS and the fact that I always seem to have *Advance Wars* in it. The dual screen has taken it to another level where you have to concentrate on two battle fronts and multiple commanders at once, what they don't realise is that I do take it out and play our new games, but always put it back as a safe haven for me. *Mario Kart* is always pulled out of the bag when I'm with a group or at the airport waiting for a flight, I can then play against so many different people from around the world on Wi-Fi Connection... and get flogged.

**g™: With Virtual Console, it seems like Nintendo wishes to draw on its impressive heritage to further enhance the appeal of Wii – is the retro side of things something that particularly interests you? And are there any Nintendo titles that you're looking forward to playing yourself on Virtual Console?**
**DY:** I like to think that the insinuation that I might like retro isn't because of my age. If a game was a good game once it should still be a good game now. I will have to wait and see what appears before I pass judgement as there are a few titles from the SNES and N64 era that I'm hoping will pop up.

**g™: With this in mind, do you think that older titles still hold some significance in the mind of the modern gamer?**
**DY:** If I offered you a 1963 V12 E-type Jag or a current model 2006 X-type what would you say, there is nothing wrong with either car and they both offer different experiences, I'd personally take the E-type. Maybe Jags aren't your bag, but I'm sure you could think of an older car that would have as much if not more appeal than a current model. In the same way that classic films and music never date – some games remain superb despite their age.

**g™: In what ways do you feel that Wii continues the whole ethos of "the Nintendo difference"?**
**DY:** I don't think that it is just me that could give an opinion on the Nintendo difference with Wii; there are so many people in the market and various commentators and analysts who are espousing the innovative nature of Wii and the opportunity for people to have totally new gaming experiences. The controller is one of the main features, but the range of ancillary benefits that Wii can offer – such as Wii Channel and Mii – add that extra dimension. Wii is so totally different to anything else that's gone before or anything that is touted as 'next generation', that really, if you want to label Wii correctly it should be called 'new generation' as nothing like it has gone before.

**"WII IS SO DIFFERENT, THAT IT SHOULD BE CALLED 'NEW GENERATION' AS NOTHING LIKE IT HAS GONE BEFORE"**

**g™: What mistakes do you think Nintendo made with GameCube, and what steps are you taking (or planning to take) to ensure Wii is a greater success?**
**DY:** We have admitted that the software line up for the immediate post-launch period of GameCube could have been handled better and with Wii we're working hard to ensure that there isn't the long wait between software launches, and that people everywhere will have plenty of games to play from launch. In addition, there was very little third-party support for GameCube at launch; this is not the case with Wii. Third-party support has been nothing short of excellent in the run up to the launch of Wii with a very diverse range of games from most of the world's top developers and studios.

**g™: Are there any other Nintendo titles likely to be GameCube releases, or is *Twilight Princess* the last major first-party GC game?**
**DY:** *The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess* is the latest first-party GameCube game we've announced. This doesn't mean that it's the last GameCube game ever – we just haven't announced any more beyond *Zelda* at this stage. Our focus for the moment is on Wii.

**g™: Why do you think Nintendo more than perhaps any other company has such a large and loyal army of hardcore fans?**
**DY:** The quirkiness that we offer and the range of fantastic first-party titles are some things that you can only get with Nintendo, the others don't offer unique experiences. Mind you, we should never take our fans for granted as we need to make sure that we don't lose them but rather gain more conscripts to the army. Any company that continually produces high quality products – in our case hardware and software – will be rewarded with a large and loyal fan base.

**g™: By targeting non-gamers and more casual players with Wii, are you concerned about potentially alienating these 'hardcore' fans or the people who play games more regularly in any way?**
**DY:** Not at all. With the launch of Wii there are games for people who are totally new to gaming or casual gamers with *Wii Sports*, *Wii Play* and so on, and for the 'hardcore fan' there are titles like *Red Steel* and *Zelda* that are hardcore gamer titles. The essence of Wii is that it is for everyone and this is reflected in the breadth of software available for the system from launch. Something as good as what we have with Wii shouldn't be restricted to any one group: what we are giving the hardcore is more opportunity to have new experiences and encourage other members of their family to enjoy the fun that they obviously have. Mind you, there certainly will be the variety of product to appeal to everyone. The same question was asked at the time of the DS launch, and we have successfully appealed to hardcore gamers with titles such as New *Super Mario Bros*, *Metroid Prime Hunters* and *Resident Evil* while at the same time attracted new gamers which has expanded the market with the likes of *Nintendogs*, *Brain Training* and *42 All-Time Classics*. There are even games such as *Animal Crossing* that bridge the gap and appeal to both new and casual gamers as well as the hardcore. This will be the same on Wii.

**g™: Nintendo DS has been a huge success, with a series of titles specifically aimed at people who don't normally play videogames, such as *Brain Training* – how significant do you think these kinds of 'non-games' could be for Wii?**
**DY:** If we are to expand the market beyond the current 'hardcore' then these games will be vital to us achieving that goal. The goal with Wii is the same as with DS – to expand the current gaming population and get more people to play videogames.

**g™: Has the success of DS surprised you at all? How do you plan to continue the momentum it has built up this year into 2007?**
**DY:** We were always confident that DS would be a success and we have worked hard as a company to ensure the success DS now enjoys, but we never sit back, and that hard work continues into 2007 and beyond. Huge titles of interest on DS for 2007 include *Zelda: Phantom Hourglass*, *Pokémon: Diamond & Pearl* and *Hotel Dusk Room 215* and we feel these titles will ensure a great 2007 for DS.

**g™: And finally, what are you most looking forward to about the Nintendo Wii launch?**
**DY:** Well, my father is 80 years old and he has already asked for a Nintendo DS and *Brain Training* for Christmas, I know that once he knows a little more about Wii – he's already asked questions about it – he will want one of those as well. That means that when he gets one – if he's good and I order it – when I visit him we will be able to play games together. The last time he played games with me was when we kicked a football together and I was only 12. To be able to have fun with my family no matter what age they are is something that I really look forward to.




# The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess

IN THE PRESENCE NEW-GENERATION GAMING ROYALTY

Joy of joys, we've finally played the most anticipated title for one of Nintendo's most anticipated consoles, or at least a bit of it anyway. Ha ha – you haven't. But as we've been told to recount our experiences of catching catfish and stabbing a dinosaur boss in the head in explicit detail, just wave your hands around while reading this preview and with a bit of imagination, you'll experience exactly what we did when we visited Nintendo UK in Slough. Especially considering the demo was exactly the same as the hands-on Nintendo was offering at E3 this year but with a revised control system.

Try to restrain the green-eyed monster, as you'll get to play *The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess* soon (sooner if your enter our competition on page 78), but there's a vast difference between watching lucky journos playing Wii in the E3 and preview videos, and actually using the Nunchuk controller to make the range of manoeuvres on screen.

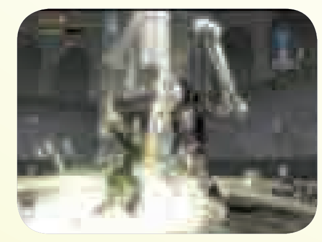
This applies to Link's bow and arrow mostly. The action of firing an arrow is surprisingly sophisticated and a degree of skill is required to wield it effectively: select your arrow with the D-pad, bring the crosshair up and target, then draw the string back with the B-button and release to fire. It's a simple procedure when faced with a sitting duck, but under pressure of attack and facing a moving target it's quite a challenge. Considering the reaction from the press after E3, we're surprised Nintendo has still refused to implement a motion-sensitive drawstring approach rather than the simple button press, but unless they ease up on the pointer's sensitivity it's probably the right way to go for now.

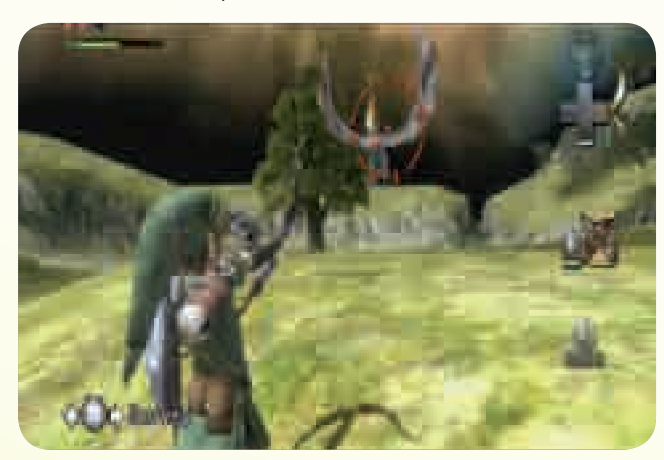
Neither do you have to mimic Link's frantic swordplay with sweeping Nunchuk gestures of your own. Save yourself from aching shoulders, because the majority of the attacks require a mere flick of the wrist for Link to respond accordingly. Even his frenetic spinning attack requires a simple revolution of the wrist and the only exception to this rule is his overhead leaping chop, a simple A-button attack. It's an odd way to round off the attack system, but perhaps Nintendo was running out of ideas or, more likely, felt an overhead chop with the Nunchuk was just too much effort considering the couch-potato ease with which the other attacks were executed.

So, armed with a little E3 demo knowledge, a sharp sword and being the gaming prodigies that we are, we trawled the *Twilight Princess* demo with relative ease. The level boss we faced looked no pushover, but we know Zelda games so we knew it was just a matter of finding the weak spot, using the special item we'd acquired on that level to incapacitate the sucker then brutally hack the dumb klutz to death. Boy, were we in for a surprise. *Twilight Princess*'s bosses take a much larger combination of artefacts to defeat them, as well as clever use of your environment. We had to shoot Dino Boy in his glowing head before legging it round to his shackles, donning Link's heavy metal boots, yanking his chains to trip him up then repeatedly stabbing him in the head. Nice.

The only facet of *Twilight Princess* that plays exactly as it looks in the video is the fishing. It's a beautifully simple and entertaining mini-game that everyone agrees should be developed into a Wii title in its own right. The circular reel motion on the Nunchuk is another example of predictable use of Wii's motion technology common to all Link's controls, but especially effective for this one. Thumbs up for the new control system, but even if you don't get on with spin attacks and archery, you can always grab a beer and chill in a rowboat.

Release: 8 December





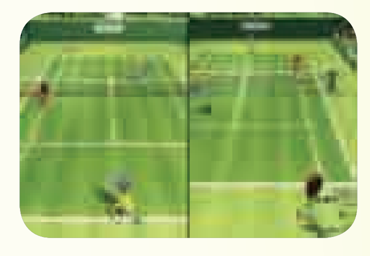
# Wii Sports

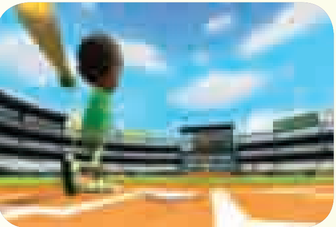
POETRY IN MOTION

Packaged with Nintendo Wii, this five-sport Wiimote-designed game (tennis, golf, boxing, baseball and ten pin bowling) had the potential to either fail through over-simplicity or excel right off the bat, and having played it on numerous occasions it's clearly the latter. Whether you're a sport fanatic or not, people of all ages will be drawn to *Wii Sports'* base-level addiction: pure fun. Whether you're going hell for leather in the boxing ring or just taking it easy with a gentle game of ten-pin bowling, *Wii Sports'* motion-control system works to a tee, registering the strength and position of your movement. You can duck and dive, weave and punch in the ring, or enjoy a gentler game of golf, requiring a smoother, relaxed motion.

The tennis works extremely well too, with lobs, slices, volleys, spin, forehand and backhand swinging motions accurately pulled off, while the baseball is also spot on with a home run a very gratifying feeling. The bowling is surprisingly good also, requiring a more complex flicking of the wrist (for spin) swing and button-release timing to simulate releasing the ball. All in all, *Wii Sports* is an excellent game and a brilliant way to kick off the Nintendo Wii experience.

Release: 8 December





# Red Steel

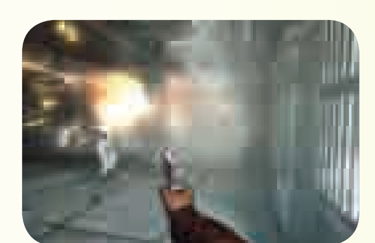
NOT SO GANGSTER'S PARADISE

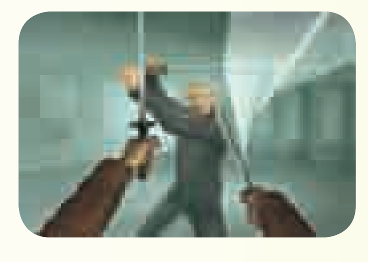
Of all the new titles we've seen, *Red Steel* offered the least to be genuinely excited about. That's not to say that there's nothing to appreciate, but when the competition is this stiff it takes something special to really stand out.

Despite the motion sensitive controls, *Red Steel* feels more conventional than anything else we tried and hardly signified a huge departure from the FPSs we all know and love. Set in modern-day Japan, the mix of samurais and gangsters allows you to wield both guns and swords. The gunplay quickly became intuitive and the interface certainly heightened what, on a control pad, could have been a fairly mundane experience. The sword, however, left a lot to be desired.

We were assured that the system will almost certainly change, but at this stage the fights felt curiously uninvolving and no closer to the reality of swordplay – surely the key purpose of a motion-control system. Other issues were primarily visual – lacking the unique graphical style of *Metroid* or *Mario*, *Red Steel*'s attempts to look realistic certainly weren't disastrous, though they did highlight one area where Nintendo Wii might be found wanting.

Release: 8 December





# Super Smash Bros Brawl

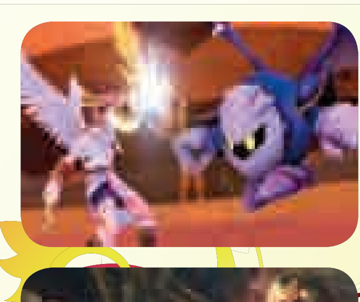
SOLID SMASH BROS GAMING

2007 – read it and weep. We've been spoiled with the selection of games come the Wii's launch, but, having dropped the release of one of its major titles into the beginning of next year, we feel like stamping our feet and throwing a tantrum at Miyamoto and co until they relent. Feel the same? Good, we're going to tease you with a few titbits.

Having been belatedly begged by Hideo Kojima to put *Metal Gear Solid*'s eponymous protagonist into the GameCube version, designer Masahiro Sakurai crowbarred Solid Snake into the burgeoning list of Nintendo and third-party characters. This is no mere cameo, Snake is fully playable and comes complete with his cardboard box for a stealth attack. There are some more questionable abilities though, including *Wario's* bloated-belly nuclear fart attack and the cutesy *Nintendogs* Labrador puppy item that gets thrown at the screen to block your vision.

And let's not forget Samus. More to the point, zero-suit Samus, as fighting a melee battle with super missiles and smart bombs wouldn't be fair. Besides, some people don't often get to see cute lasses in slinky PVC outfits. We do, 'cause we're cool and chicks love us and all that.

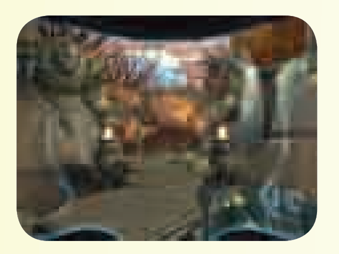
Release: 2007

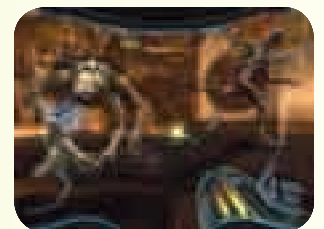




# Metroid Prime 3: Corruption

A PRIME EXAMPLE OF METROID?





Getting full marks, in this magazine at least, is no easy task. It's not a matter of being good, or even great, the game must be faultless. In 50 issues only two games have ever scored the perfect ten, and *Metroid Prime* on GameCube is one of them. The sequel was a fine game though it lacked the element of surprise, and *Metroid Prime 3: Corruption*, by dint of having Wii's unique interface to exploit, has the potential to reach the giddy heights of the original.

Though branded an FPS, *Metroid's* gameplay has more in common with a 3D platformer, and it is this that makes the motion control so satisfying to use. Functions like the morph ball and grapple beam take the gameplay well beyond a basic move-and-shoot mechanic, and it is clear that Retro has endeavoured to use the controllers in as many ways as possible. A good example was opening doors: it would have been enough to simply push the A-button, but *Corruption* requires a string of three distinct movements that exactly mirror the process. As with all Wii games, the aiming takes time to acclimatise to, but what at first seems fiddly and over-sensitive soon becomes second nature. The lock-on system certainly papers over a few cracks in this respect, allowing you to fire a successful shot without being a hundred per cent accurate.

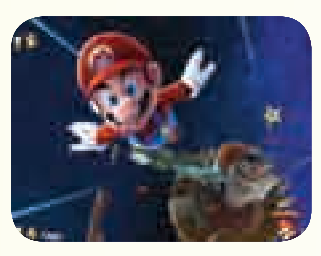
We did notice that many of the flying enemies were immune to lock-on, a clever ploy that forces you to explore the subtleties of the interface and improve your performance. Whether any of this amounts to another perfect score is hard to say; the game we saw was a long way from completion, and despite some nifty uses of the controller, it looked and felt exactly like its predecessors. Time will tell.

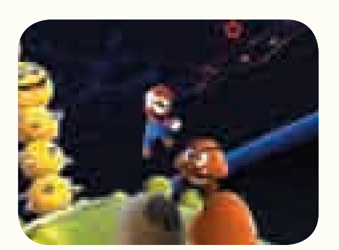
Release: 2007 TBC



# Super Mario Galaxy

WILL THIS TAKE OFF FOR MARIO AND Wii?





*Super Mario 64* is justly hailed as a classic for dragging platformers into the world of 3D. Innovations like that don't come around very often, and it may have taken until now for *Mario* to really deliver on its promise. *Super Mario Galaxy* is three-dimensional in every sense, with the sky now as much your playground as the land laid out around you.

Mario's new ability to fly great distances, and at speed, between stars and planets opens up a whole host of exciting possibilities. You can now land on a surface upside down and simply run up to the top, broadening the play area significantly.

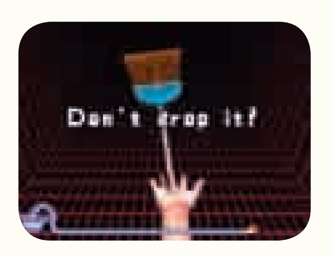
Mario is controlled in a fairly conventional way – the analogue stick for movement, while the buttons and a quick circular motion grant access to the various attacks. More novel is the cursor – shaped like a star and followed by a blue trail of light – that appears when you point the Wiimote at the screen. With this, you can interact with the environment entirely separate to where Mario is running. For example, point the cursor at a bell, press the button and it will ring, sending a shower of musical notes toward the ground for Mario to collect. Point the cursor at a nearby enemy and it will freeze them, allowing Mario to dispatch them at leisure.

It is a technique that rewards accuracy and a steady hand, while greatly encouraging exhaustive exploration of the world around you – occasionally it's not so much Mario interacting with the environment as it is the environment interacting with Mario. Of course, with new additions to the *Zelda* and *Metroid* franchises also due for release, *Super Mario Galaxy* isn't quite a shoe-in for Most Promising Game, but outside of such esteemed company there is little that comes close to the verve and imagination evidenced here.

Release: Q1 2007

## WarioWare: Smooth Moves

NICELY DONE



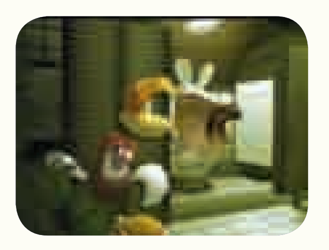

Getting hands-on with Wario and chums has proven as fruitful as expected with *Smooth Moves* retaining all of the series' trademark humour and gaudy visuals, while adding an extra dimension to play thanks to the control system. The game asks you to hold the remote in unique ways, with names like 'mohawk' (on your head), 'waiter' (balanced on the palm of your hand) and 'chauffer' (yes, like a steering wheel), all of which adds immeasurably to the frenetic nature of the whole *WarioWare* affair.

And it's brilliant – hilarious, endlessly playable and genuinely innovative. *Smooth Moves* is simultaneously an ingenious Wii tech demo and a magnificent party game in its own right. Only a handful of its 200 micro-games have been unveiled, but we're huge fans of slapping Wario in the face, and the old *WarioWare* favourite – slicing veg – is better than ever. Great stuff.

Release: March 2007

## Rayman Raving Rabbids

WE'RE IN THE MOOD FOR DANCING



Ubisoft's attempt to out-Wario Wario is looking more and more promising with every viewing. Brimming with character, charm and deft Ancel touches, *Raving Rabbids* is essentially a mix of *WarioWare* and the more traditional mini-game collection. The 80 challenges are split into four categories: FPS, dance, and race – which comprise of ten games each – and 50 micro-games varying from carrot juice shooting to cow hurling. It's all good, clean honest French fun.

Bizarrely, the team at Ubisoft has seen fit to attach a story to its mini-game mayhem. A crew of rather unusual alien rabbits have come to Earth with one mission – to dance. If they're not dancing, then they're not happy; so it's up to everyone's favourite limbless wonder to keep them entertained. Through the medium of mini-games. Who said game stories weren't maturing?

Release: 8 December

## Call Of Duty 3

MOVE OVER XBOX 360



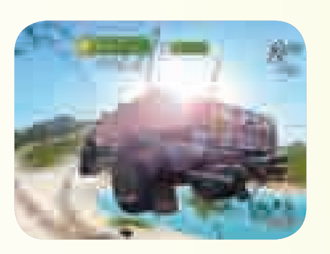
The FPS is bound to be a bone of contention on Wii. Due to the unique control system, its likely publishers will want to port unsuitable shooters to the console for a quick buck. Thankfully, *Call Of Duty 3* is not one such discordant effort, as Treyarch has made every effort to ensure its latest WWII epic is as Wii friendly as possible.

Along with the now familiar 'remote to aim, analogue to move' control system, *COD3* is littered with touches that fully utilise the controller. Rowing boats, wrenching weapons from enemies' hands, placing charges – all require dextrous manipulation of the controllers. Throwing grenades is also excellent, requiring a button press to select, then a boisterous hurling movement with the Nunchuk. It's fantastically different to the 360 version. Obviously, the visuals have taken a hit, dampening the atmosphere, but the controls more than make up for it. A most pleasant surprise.

Release: 8 December

## Excite Truck

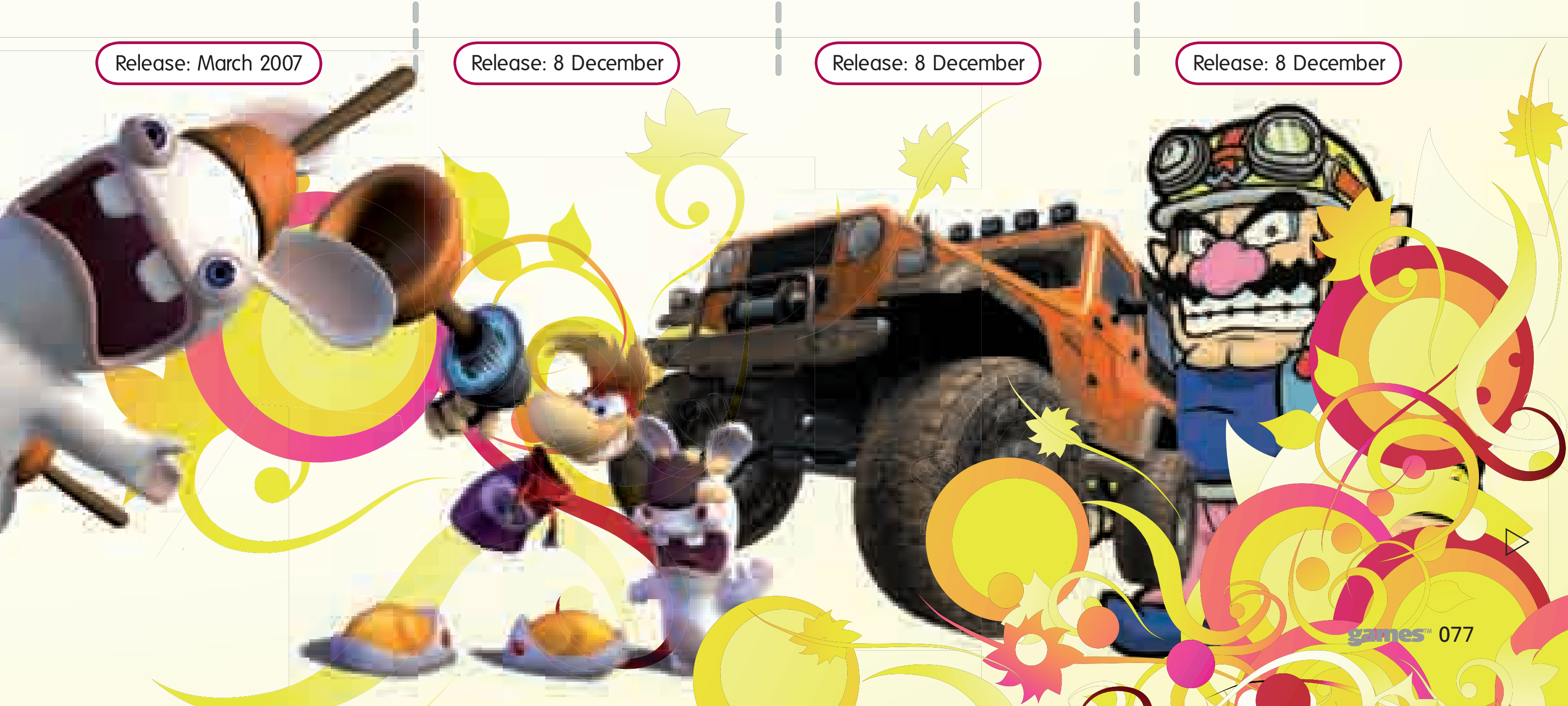
Wii ARE SO EXCITED WE'RE HAVING TROUBLE HIDING IT

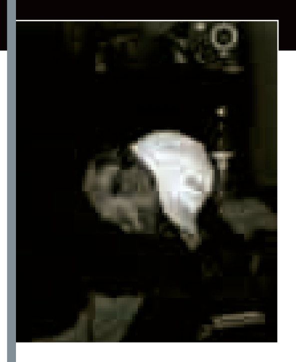


The game with the bizarre name is actually far more interesting than you might think. Essentially an off-road racer, *Excite Truck* is all about the controller. Holding the remote like a steering wheel and accelerating with the face buttons, racing is a joy. As with most Wii games, you'll need a brief acclimatisation period but will soon be haring around the rocky courses, leaping over gorges and screaming around hairpins as easily as you would with an analogue stick.

Visually, *Excite Truck* is one of the better looking Wii titles too, with a visual sheen that outclasses GameCube and genuinely adds to the overall trucking experience, but it's the mid-air twisting and turning that defines the title. Deft tilts and twists of the controller can add or subtract seconds from your lap times, and there's little more satisfying than a perfectly landed jump. Set to be a multi-player favourite.

Release: 8 December





# The Players

**WITH THE PUBLIC'S BURGEONING APPETITE FOR VIDEOGAMES, TAKING THIS HOBBY TO A PROFESSIONAL LEVEL IS NOW A VIABLE MEANS OF BREADWINNING. THE WORLD'S NUMBER ONE PRO GAMER LETS US KNOW JUST HOW GOOD HIS JOB IS**

### CREATIVE LABS

## JONATHAN 'FATAL1TY' WENDEL

WORDS: **BEN BIGGS**

**Jonathan Wendel is a cyber athlete and a member of the Cyberathlete Professional League (CPL).** Widely recognised as the best *Quake 3* player in the world, and with a supernatural ability to target a pixel-sized headshot from a virtual distance of a mile away, he's done pretty well for himself as a professional gamer. So well, in fact, that in 2005 he grossed $231,000 in competition prize money, not to mention the lucrative sponsorship deal he has with PC hardware manufacturer, Creative Labs.

But having travelled from the US to Germany and then on to Blighty's i28 LAN Festival in one weekend, today he's tired – and it shows. Of the 20 or so blind hopefuls that line up to give Fatal1ty a run for his money, one gives him a wake-up call with a well-timed rocket. It's the closest anyone's come to killing him even once today. He grimaces at the close shave, frustrated at letting his own high standards slip, and then sets about humiliating his opponent with the quickest 40-0 drubbing you've ever seen.

"It's my hobby, it's something I love to do," says Fatal1ty frankly, "I really wanted to make money out of something I love doing, so I became world champion at it." An inspiring sentiment indeed, especially considering this was only his first step towards securing his future with his endorsement of several Creative Labs products.

As a typical ten-year-old gaming fanatic in Missouri, USA, Wendel's path to gaming glory began under fairly inauspicious circumstances – a product of the early Nineties SNES generation. In these pre-*Doom* years, before FPSs took centre stage, his game of choice was Midway's *Mortal Kombat*, a title in which he achieved an 'invincible' level of expertise. His preference for skilled duelling rather than mass brawling followed into his teens and he made his debut as an 18-year-old pro gamer in the 1999 *Quake III Arena* tournament at the CPL Frag 3 event. Having been ranked third, he ambitiously decided to take his hobby further.

"I approached a company [Razer] back in 2000 to be sponsored and they said, 'yeah, we'll pay you $30,000 a year'. So I'm in my kitchen talking to my dad and it's like, 'Dad, I think I'm gonna do it, you know, I'm gonna be a pro gamer. And even if it doesn't work out, at least I've tried."

It's hardly every doting parent's career of choice for their child, but when your son's school-bunking hobby lands him a $150,000 prize in 2005, a total of over $1 million in prizes in the last eight years and a reputation among his peers as the number one gamer in the world, you can hardly accuse him of wasting his time. And with up to eight hours a day spent practising manoeuvres with his training partner, and being drilled military-style by his manager, Fatal1ty isn't in the habit of wasting time with any other distraction. He applies himself to his vocation with as much zeal as any professional sportsman. "Practise is something you have to do to become the best at anything. A professional golfer, professional tennis player – a professional anything takes practise. This is the walk of life, I just happen to have turned my hobby into a career."

This attitude has given Fatal1ty a reputation for being the world's first 'serious' pro gamer. But it's not just ethos and work ethic that sets videogaming on a par with conventional sports – other parallels between these professions are becoming more apparent too. Stateside, the multi billion-dollar game industry grosses more than both the American football and baseball leagues, so there's no surprise that LAN events and now high-profile professional gamers have attracted big business. As a part of his sponsorship deal with Creative Labs, Fatal1ty has endorsed a range of products by the hardware manufacturer, including the X-Fi, Creative's latest PC sound card technology and the Fatal1ty gaming mouse. However, unlike the typically passive role a sporting hero plays in his endorsement deals, Fatal1ty was heavily involved in Creative's products from the ground up.

"I had huge input in the design of the mouse: how it's shaped, how it fits in my hand, the idea for the grooves – everything about it. I worked hand-in-hand with the designers to develop this product, and was constantly testing it. They'd send me samples and I'd tell them they needed to change this and this, totally tweaking the product to be the best it could be."

Fatal1ty's tenacity and passion have paid dividends, with a schoolboy's dream career for his pains. Considering his alternative was IT consultancy, he'll be the first in line to admit that, despite the occasional bout of playtime fatigue, he has the best job in the world. "My hobby is my job; half of it is fun and half of it is work. I'm willing to make the sacrifice because I know if I were to have a 'real' job, it would all be work."

*Creative Lab's Fatal1ty X-Fi and gaming mouse are available now for the PC and were reviewed in issue 48 and on page160 respectively.*




**"I REALLY WANTED TO MAKE MONEY OUT OF SOMETHING I LOVE DOING, SO I BECAME WORLD CHAMPION AT IT"**

*JONATHAN 'FATAL1TY' WENDEL*


5
Videogame
To celebrate games™'s m
compiled this guide to
landmarks in videogame

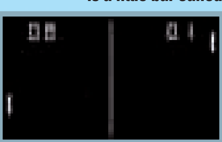

Landmarks
ilestone 50th issue, we've
the 50 most important
history. Beginning with...
SONY

## ...A LONG TIME AGO

**1962** It's almost impossible to definitively claim when the videogame was invented, but it is fair to say that *Spacewar*, designed by students at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1962, was one of the first. The game asked two players to pilot spaceships in a duel around the gravity well of a star, and was the inspiration for later videogame hits such as *Asteroids* and *Star Control* not to mention the very first arcade game, *Computer Space*. Sadly, children of the Sixties would never get to play *Spacewar* as it ran on a giant mainframe computer known as the DEC PDP-1. Jipped. Only one such machine is now known to exist and can currently be found at the Game On exhibition in London.

## PONG

**1972** In Silicon Valley, California, there is a little bar called Andy Capp's Tavern. It was here that Atari's table tennis simulator, based on a concept by Ralph Baer, was tested for the first time. Within a day, the owner of the bar was on the phone saying the machine had broken. In fact, the coin slot had become so clogged by punters frantically cramming in their quarters that no more would go in. The next day the line of people stretched around the block. Any list of gaming landmarks should include *Pong*. It is one of those annoying inevitabilities that are so tempting to rebel against, but impossible to justify transgressing. This, friends, was the genesis of the commercial game industry.

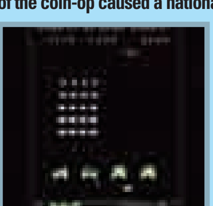


## AN INDUSTRY TAKES SHAPE

**1977** In the same year that *Star Wars* blew kids' minds the world over, some of us were more interested in what was happening on the small screen. We'd enjoyed games on TV before, most notably with *Pong*-based TV games, but Atari 2600 was the first big device to allow new games to be played with each cartridge inserted. Many of our favourite arcade games could be played at home for a fraction of the cost, and several new titles were developed that would capture gamers' imaginations. *Adventure*, *Pitfall*, *Yars' Revenge*… the list goes on and, although bigger and better things were to come, the period between 1977 and 1983 was an age of discovery for fledgling gamers and the start of a multi-million-dollar industry for almost every US publisher. Except EA… who started on C64.

## SPACE INVADERS

**1978** We could probably leave this landmark with a title alone and be done as Taito's 1978 shooter is one of the few games in history with a name familiar even outside gaming circles. Toshihiro Nishikado's design was a template for many clones and kick-started the exponential popularity of videogaming. It was the first to use the concept of lives and feature a game that couldn't be won. Upon its release, the boom of the coin-op caused a national coin shortage in Japan. Until this point, games were considered part of the entertainment industry – *Space Invaders* set the ball rolling for videogames as an industry in its own right.



## THE WORLD'S FIRST THIRD-PARTY PUBLISHER

**1979** Unhappy at Atari, four of the firm's best programmers – David Crane, Larry Kaplan, Alan Miller and Bob Whitehead – formed Activision, the first third-party publisher. It valued the creative voice of the developers not the marketing department. With *Pitfall*, Activision became a force to be reckoned with inspiring several new developers to set up shop. Atari 2600 owners no longer had to put up with substandard conversions.

## GAMING'S FIRST SUPERSTAR

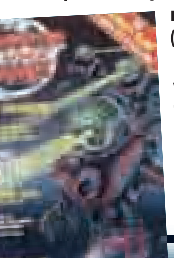
**1980** Mario, Sonic and Master Chief may all be more recognisable now, but each videogame icon owes its status to the original game celebrity. Though he was little more than a yellow circle with a mouth, Pac-Man was the first in-game character, his characteristics bolstered by the first ever cut-scenes. The hungry protagonist became the face of videogames overnight, his image plastered on t-shirts, lunch boxes and TV shows as 'Pac-Mania' took hold. Although being the first undoubtedly helped, we like to think that Pac-Man's success can be attributed to the simple play mechanics of the coin-op. By using only one four-way joystick and no buttons, *Pac-Man* was accessible to anyone, and his widespread appeal was assured – a strategy Nintendo was keen to emulate.

## THE DS'S GRANDDAD

**1980** Though it had enjoyed moderate success in the arcades, the coin-op business was a dangerously competitive market in the late-Seventies, with profits far from guaranteed. So, in what would turn out to be a typical Nintendo strategy, the house of Mario carved its own niche to conquer with the Game & Watch. Designed so that children could afford to enjoy videogames on a much smaller budget and without hogging the family's television, the Game & Watch series of portable LCD games were a massive success and an early indicator of Nintendo's preference to think outside the box. Looking back, the line of handhelds was responsible for several gaming innovations including the first ever D-pad and even the twin screens which would go on to amaze everyone with the launch of Nintendo DS some 24 years later.

## THE WORLD'S FIRST GAME MAGAZINES

**1981** Long before the birth of the stellar publication you hold in your hands, the videogame magazine simultaneously took shape on both sides of the Atlantic as America's *Electronic Games* and Britain's *Computer + Video Games* both launched in November 1981. Reflecting the contrasting game scenes of the two countries, each mag was radically different from the other. *Electronic Games* reviewed only Atari 2600 games in its debut issue, while *C+VG* focused more on the thriving home computer scene with many of its pages taken up by 'type-in' games. Despite inventing many of the terms we now take for granted (screenshot, playability) *Electronic Games* was discontinued in 1985 while *Computer + Video Games* kept going until 2004 having enjoyed a mid-Nineties golden era.



## BEST OF BRITISH

**1982** It wasn't the first system and it wasn't the most powerful, but the ZX Spectrum makes our list because it was cheap and British. The affordable £125 launch price made it one of the most accessible machines in the UK, and the Speccy quickly built a huge user base of eager gamers and young developers. Clive Sinclair's BASIC programming language was easy to learn and helped many 'bedroom programmers' enter the game industry in a way that wasn't possible in the US or Japan. Rare, Codemasters, Blitz and Zee-3 all cut their teeth on the rubber-keyed wonder, and for that we owe the underpowered computer a massive debt of gratitude.

## 10 THE VIDEOGAME CRASH

**1983** It's debatable whether the early crash of the console market in 1983 had an effect on Spectrum-loving Brits, but its impact on the American game scene cannot be underestimated. At the time, US consumers were becoming confused and disillusioned with the booming console industry as too many machines were competing for TV space and certain companies were releasing substandard games just to make a quick buck. The straw that broke the camel's back is widely regarded as Atari's *ET* (pictured: creator Howard Scott Warshaw). Though it was made in just six days it was a technical achievement only matched by God, the truth was the game was terrible. Atari lost millions as disenchanted parents returned *ET* to stores and stopped buying console games all together.

## 11 THE BEST OF THE BEST

**1984** Debuting on the BBC Micro in September 1984 before being ported to nearly every 8-bit platform in existence, *Elite* was one of the very first fully three-dimensional games. Starting with a tiny space ship and a handful of cash, the player had to explore an entire wire-frame-rendered galaxy. Elite status could be achieved in several different ways. They could, for example, earn a living through honest trading between planets or take the riskier but more exciting path of the space pirate. The game went on to sell over a million copies and is often cited as one of the best retro releases of all time, although its overall significance can be attributed less to its sales figures and more to its influence on future generations. Being the first game to offer a free-roaming environment and open-ended gameplay, *Elite* has a lot to answer for.

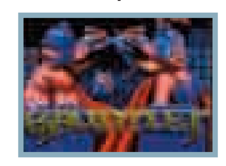
## 12 HOW THE ARCADES WERE PRESERVED

**MID 80s** Before the Jamma cabinet, arcade games were built from the ground up with custom parts specific to that game. Manufacturing was expensive, the final cost often too much for arcade operators. By the mid-Eighties the arcade scene was floundering as operators couldn't afford new cabs, and gamers grew tired of seeing the same games. Thankfully, the introduction of the Jamma standard – allowing new games to be produced on a single PCB and plugged into a cabinet like a console cartridge – alleviated costs for both manufacturers and operators. Best of all, the Jamma Board allowed the arcade industry to reach its peak with many all-time classics released in the subsequent years. If only the scene hadn't died off once consoles became as powerful…



## 13 GAUNTLET ARCADE

**1985** Developed and published by Atari, *Gauntlet* was an instant success and was soon translated over to the various consoles and computers of the time.



It was the first dungeon-crawling game and it monopolised TSR's famous *Dungeons & Dragons* board games at that time. Its massive popularity was due in part to its simple premise and because it was the first arcade game to feature four-player co-op where friends would ostensibly work together to defeat the rooms packed with enemies, only to hog the power-ups and life-giving food. *Gauntlet*'s impact on youth culture manifested itself in the game's voiceover being used in *NetHack*, the *Computer Warrior* character spanning several issues of *Eagle* comic and even a novel by Richard C White.

## 14 IT'S-A-ME

**1985** First appearing annonymously in a game starring a big ape, Mario soon achieved bigger things. He went on to star in his first NES game, and his popularity exploded. *Super Mario Bros* was fast, colourful and fun. Although designed to appeal to children, it kept adults interested, and the game's still playable today. Several sequels followed, but Mario was clearly no slouch as each game built upon the template of the last redefining the genre. His finest hour was arguably *Super Mario 64*, the first title to transport the platform genre into 3D. In our opinion, it's never been bettered, but we still hope *Super Mario Galaxy* can reach loftier heights.

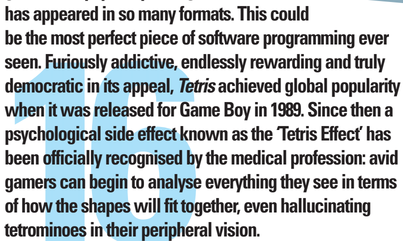
## 15 NINTENDO REVIVES THE GAME INDUSTRY



**1985** The crash of 1983 left a gap in the market. Home computers like C64 and Amiga were luring US gamers to their cause, but high prices and complicated machines left many families wanting. In stepped Nintendo with a new console it referred to as an 'entertainment system' and cartridges it called 'game paks' to distinguish itself from the console market Atari had burned to the ground. It was a risky but worthwhile move. The console industry was back on its feet.

## 16 TETRIS

**1985** First appearing on the IBM PC, *Tetris* is one of the most recognisable games. From watches to calculators to mobile phones to almost any computer system you can name, no other game, except perhaps *Pong*, has appeared in so many formats. This could be the most perfect piece of software programming ever seen. Furiously addictive, endlessly rewarding and truly democratic in its appeal, *Tetris* achieved global popularity when it was released for Game Boy in 1989. Since then a psychological side effect known as the 'Tetris Effect' has been officially recognised by the medical profession: avid gamers can begin to analyse everything they see in terms of how the shapes will fit together, even hallucinating tetrominoes in their peripheral vision.



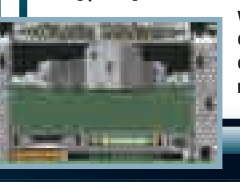
## 17 BATTERY CARTRIDGE SAVES

**1986** In 1986, the NES underwent a revolution of sorts with its game software. *Zelda* had already found success in Japan and had a similar reception worldwide when released on cartridge internationally. It was a game that defied genre definitions and, for the first time, featured battery-based saves. The cartridge had a tiny piece of volatile RAM backed up by a lithium battery so the game wasn't lost when the NES was switched off. Prior to this, games were 'saved' using a password system which meant extra coding time for Nintendo's dev team. The player had to play until given the next password, and losing the password would mean a complete restart. It was a move that paved the way for future-generation console games until the introduction of the memory card and eventually console hard disk drive.



## 18 FREEEEEEDOM

**1987** Opinion is divided over whether the re-use of 3D engines, like Epic's Unreal Engine 3, is a good thing for gamers, but it's undoubtedly of massive importance for budget-conscious developers. To all those FPS designers who can't live without the latest 3D construction set, the launch of Incentive's Freescape Engine is the equivalent of the invention of the wheel. First used in *Driller*, the Freescape Engine wowed Spectrum owners with its filled polygons and 3D perspective, even if it was a bit slow. The engine was used in five more games before being packaged as the 3D Construction Set, which let gamers create their own immersive masterpieces.



## R-TYPE

19

**1987** Irem's side-scrolling shooter has left a legacy unlike any other. It took the genre and gave it gigantic proportions, featuring a mire of enemies to navigate your way through, a ridiculous number of power-ups and some seriously heavy artillery at your disposal. Much of the game is spent avoiding being trapped against the edge of the screen and thus destroyed rather than evading enemy fire, and the third level is one of the most memorable in history, with an enormous boss that swamps the entire length of the level.

## GAME BOY

20

**1989** Nintendo knew that for a handheld to be successful it would have to be several things: small, light, durable, and packaged with an essential game on release. Sticking to this template, Game Boy managed to see off the challenge of its advanced competitors, the Lynx and Game Gear. Game Boy was the first handheld with interchangeable cartridges, and brought the concept of 'gaming on the go' to the world. The camera peripheral was also the first of its kind, the precursor to every equivalent piece of console technology since. The ad campaign was one of the first examples of a console marketed to 20-somethings and Game Boy marked a huge step on gaming's path to being a democratic medium.

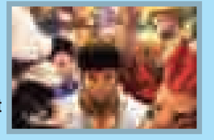
## NINTENDO'S FOLLY AND THE SNES CD

21

**1991** The whole SNES CD-ROM saga is a long-winded story filled with twists and turns, but its outcome is always the same. In 1991, Nintendo and Sony struck a deal to create PlayStation, a CD add-on drive for SNES. However, after discovering that a deal struck in 1988 meant Sony had controlling rights to the licence and distribution of all PlayStation games, Nintendo pulled out of the deal. After trying to resurrect the concept with Phillips, the SNES CD eventually died. This, of course, let Sony into the race. The technology that the firm had worked on was now freely available for the real PlayStation, the machine that barged its way into the market and pushed is way straight to the top. Instead of capitalising on its dominance, Nintendo had effectively allowed itself to drop into second place, a slippery slope which could have led to its demise.

## STREET FIGHTER II

22



**1991** Superbly realised characters, acres of charm and pixel-perfect mechanics made a series so popular it's hard to imagine a world without it. The secret of its success? Balance. Compared to *Mortal Kombat*, it's clear that *SFII* is a master class in game design – for every punch there's a counter punch, for every attack a defence. Even in an age of realistic 3D fighters, it's an indication of *Street Fighter*'s class that it is still a popular Xbox Live Arcade title (albeit in 'hyper' form) over a decade after its release. A classic.

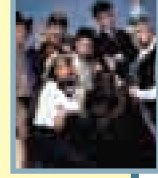
## MARIO KART

23

**1992** There are more important games than *Mario Kart* in this list, but the smart money says that not one of them will age as gracefully. Voted Best Retro Game Of All Time by games™, *Mario Kart* has such timeless appeal that every one of its five updates has failed to supersede its achievements. The original kart-racing game and the first to use weapons as a core facet of the gameplay, it was a pioneer in a number of ways: most importantly in its popularisation of split-screen racing, which had been used before but never well enough to capture the imaginations and ruin the finger joints of millions. *Mario Kart* did just that, and its power to do so is still potent.

## VIDEOGAMES ON TV

24



**1992** The Nineties saw a boom in videogame-based TV shows, putting games on an equal footing with popular TV shows of the time. The programmes embraced the rise of game culture and were targeted at adolescent youths, some going so far as to place leather-clad vixens in strategic positions around the set. Their slump and relegation to satellite and cable channels can be attributed to the burgeoning number of game websites and adult games proliferating the market. But the legacy of these programmes is that they brought videogames to the mainstream and to kids who went on to pursue games as a hobby.

## DOOM

25



**1993** It might actually be impossible to sum up the experience of first encountering *Doom* in the space granted here. That ominous music, the 3D graphics, the intricate level design, the buckets of gore and gut-churning brutality: it perfected things that you barely knew existed, and in a heartbeat every other game felt marginal and insignificant. It's the blood-soaked godfather of the most popular gaming genre. *Wolfenstein 3D* may be the original FPS, but in terms of pure impact *Doom* will always be the landmark.

## RARE HITS THE BIG TIME

26

**1994** Founded by Chris and Tim Stamper just before their first code-shop Ultimate Play The Game was sold off to US Gold, Rare was the first UK-based developer to be granted a licence to produce NES games after the brothers managed to reverse engineer the Japanese Famicom. Several years and a bucket-load of NES games later Rare was asked to develop the graphically astounding *Donkey Kong Country* for SNES and was soon bought up by Nintendo. Undergoing a period of rapid expansion, the team went on to develop some of the greatest games of the Nineties (*Blast Corp*, *GoldenEye*, *Banjo Kazooie*) and was eventually sold to Microsoft for a cool $377 million.

## SONY PLAYSTATION

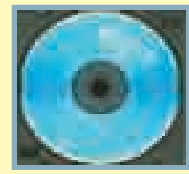
27

**1994** One of the truly seismic events in the history of gaming, the release of Sony's PlayStation pulled more people back to gaming than any console before or since. The quality of the 3D graphics marked a leap greater than that made by PlayStation2 or, on current evidence, even PlayStation3. As hard as it is to believe now, back in 1995 those visuals were truly amazing. Above all though, PlayStation was Sony's entrance to the industry. Nobody expected much from a company more commonly associated with TVs and CD players, but the gaming landscape is now unimaginable without it. After a decade of the Nintendo/Sega duopoly, videogames had a new superpower, and PlayStation would go on to sell more than 100 million units. It is hard to imagine a console having this level of impact ever again.






## CD/DVD-ROM CONSOLES



**1995** For more than a decade, cartridges were the only medium for game consoles since the NES. Phillips had pioneered its Laserdisks on the ill-fated CDi in the early-Nineties, but the huge and heavy disks proved even more unpopular than most of the poor-quality releases, and the technology was swiftly ground underfoot by the launch of SNES. It wasn't until Sony embraced Compact Disks for PSOne that the more expensive cartridge format was threatened. Nintendo stood stubbornly by its favoured media, but while N64 was a popular machine, Nintendo lost a lot of ground to Sony due, in part, to the lower production costs that lead to Square taking the *Final Fantasy* series over to Sony.

## POKÉMON

**1996** When approaching *Pokémon* it is important to ditch every preconception that encounters with children rabidly grabbing at the eponymous playing cards may have left you with. The original Game Boy title was an accomplished and insanely addictive piece of work that resurrected the fortunes of the ailing Nintendo almost single-handedly. No *Pokémon*. No GameCube. No Wii. It might very well be that simple. The subsequent impact can only be described as a cultural phenomenon, perhaps the biggest of the Nineties. Many would see the craze as a purely negative aspect, but not every landmark need necessarily be good in the eyes of the world. To this day, grown men jealously treasure tiny slips of card as if they were pure gold. How many games can boast that?

## THE LEGEND OF LARA

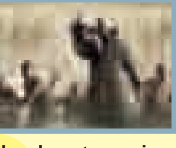
**1996** Many of the games that appear in this list can be labelled 'cultural phenomena', but surely none more so than the original *Tomb Raider*. Released in 1996 on PlayStation, PC and Sega Saturn to massive critical acclaim, it was perhaps more important for introducing the world to Ms Lara Croft. Despite being a wildly disproportionate collection of polygons and teenage sexual desire, Croft became the very definition of an icon – a Super Mario for the children of the Sony age. Even though the original few games were excellent, it mattered not, Lara had arrived and she was here to stay.

## E3: DAWN OF THE MEGASHOW

**1995** There were trade shows before E3. The Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas was already a major stop on the games PR drive, as was the European Computer Trade Show in London, but nobody that witnessed its inauspicious start on 11 May 1995 could have predicted the giddy heights E3 would one day hit. Arriving at the dawn of a new era in gaming – Sega released Saturn, Nintendo announced N64 and Sony was finalising PlayStation – the timing could scarcely have been better, and over time E3 would come to be recognised as the public face of the revitalised industry. E3 introduced glamour to an industry that could previously lay claim to none. The format collapsed, quite justifiably, under the weight of its own grandeur and decadence this year, prompting many to bid it good riddance. They do its legacy little justice.



## RESIDENT EVIL



**1996** Shinji Mikami's horror masterpiece laid the groundwork for a hugely successful franchise that has spawned numerous sequels and even two movies. It's the mixture of tension and action that had fans rapt, and who can forget the series' most iconic moments. The dogs shattering the windows? *Resi Evil 2*'s alligator attack? The first appearance of the Nemesis? Without *Resident Evil*, the horror genre would be languishing – a niche within a niche.

## EMULATION

**1997** It's the late-Nineties, PC power is continuing to exceed Gordon Moore's archaic law, and arcades are dying with the rise of Sony and Nintendo's consoles. But there's a core of programmers and electronics experts, led by Nicola Salmoria, who want to document the thousands of arcade games before the cabs fall apart, the components decay and vital software is lost. The best way is to emulate the software and distribute the program via the net. Thus began the Multi Arcade Machine Emulator (MAME) program, a project that inspired many to create emulation programs for all consoles, preserving their legacy.

## 3D PC GRAPHICS CARDS

**1996** The Nineties saw a huge rise in consumer appetite for 3D graphics as Windows took off and PC owners began to eye the tasty visuals of the two big console manufacturers. Until the dawn of Windows, PC graphics had been an onboard affair: a simple 2D VGA chip with a tiny bit of RAM. So manufacturers ATI and Matrox churned out 2D PCI graphics cards with 3D functions effectively bolted on. However, it wasn't until 3Dfx released its first Voodoo product, a dedicated 3D card that required a motherboard with a separate 2D accelerator, that game developers could exploit this new power and PC gamers could finally enjoy the same graphical immersion their console-hugging buddies were enjoying.

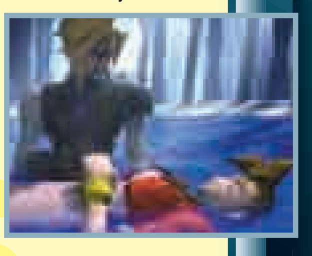
## NINTENDO 64 - A SEA OF INNOVATION

**1996** That N64's finest games are landmarks on their own is no secret, but the machine itself proved an innovative force in gaming, and so did its controller. Although the analogue stick technically first appeared on Atari 5200, N64 was the first console to actually make proper use of it, allowing 3D space to be manipulated properly for the first time. The three-pronged joypad satisfied both old and new-school players alike. That's not where the innovation stopped however. With the release of *Lylat Wars* came the Rumble Pak, a force feedback mechanism that slotted into the back of the pad and changed the way we interact with games forever. As developers became more skilled with this new technology, its uses became more complex. Unsurprisingly, the tech became commonplace in the industry, and PS3's lack of rumble is startlingly noticeable.



## FINAL FANTASY VII

**1997** This 1997 release crossed a number of boundaries to make it into the annals of history as a game that represents more than just the cult status it achieved. It was the first game in the *Final Fantasy* series for PSOne and consequently the first *FF* game to be released in the UK. It was also the first to be ported to PC, although it was a buggy and unpopular release in this format.

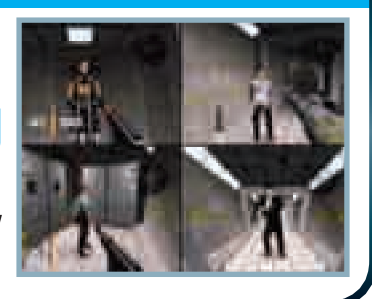


*FFVII* also featured a landmark moment in gaming where Cloud Strife's love interest, Aeris, is killed by the antagonist Sephiroth. It's an unanticipated twist and the tragic cut-scene that follows marks this title out from the genre-defining series.

## GOLDENEYE

37

**1997** If you didn't play *GoldenEye* yet owned a Nintendo 64 in its heyday, then smack your own wrists because you missed out on an iconic game of its generation. Not only was *GoldenEye* Rare's debut first-person shooter – another in a long list of hugely successful collaborations with Nintendo – but it brought the likes of quad split-screen multi-player and the proximity mine to the scene, a weapon that would prove the bane of the experienced and the blessing of the opportunist, especially if you knew where all the spawn points were on that particular level.



## GRAN TURISMO

38

**1998** Polyphony Digital's masterful driving sim opened PlayStation up to a host of petrol-headed non-gamers when it arrived in 1998. The ultimate in racing realism, *Gran Turismo* mixed faultless handling, beautiful visuals and the finest details of engine tuning to produce a franchise that stood head and shoulders above the pack. It completely changed the digital racing game, and is set to do great business once again when it (finally) appears on PlayStation3.



## HALF-LIFE

39

**1998** If *Doom* was the game that launched the FPS, *Half-Life* was the moment it grew up. Modern action games' preoccupation with character, drama and story, can all be traced back to

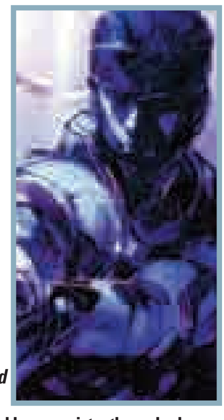


Gordon Freeman's first furtive steps into the Black Mesa facility. Freeman is a scientist, a nerd, and a recognisable and empathetic hero who broke the mould in terms of videogame characterisation. From the first second of the astonishingly languid opening sequence you are never allowed to leave the world of the game. Every character, every plot development is seamlessly integrated with the action, bringing games closer than ever to cinematic immersion.

## METAL GEAR SOLID

40

**1998** How do we love thee, Solid Snake? Let us count the ways. Gaming's 'coolest yet least cool' character has starred in some of the most culturally aware, intelligent and phenomenally playable games in history, even dating back to the series' origins on the humble MSX. The brainchild of Hideo Kojima, *Metal Gear Solid* effectively gave birth to videogame stealth, and has consistently pushed back the boundaries of what can be done in an action videogame. As criticised as it is revered, the series' predilection for elongated cut-scenes, elaborate characterisation and overly complicated stories certainly splits videogamers down the middle, but no one can dispute Kojima's vision and drive for his art. His games continue to be the bar against which all others are set – a tradition that *Metal Gear Solid 4* looks set to maintain.



## THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: OCARINA OF TIME

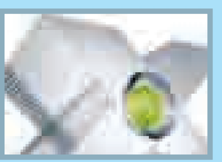
41

**1998** Link has racked up a series of massive hits for Nintendo and the 1998 release of *Ocarina Of Time* has proved the most popular *Zelda* ever. Part of its appeal was that it was one of the first 3D RPGs to feature open-world gaming, allowing Link to roam and to a certain extent, complete missions in any order. Despite the childish animation, its gritty plot, evocative musical score and stunning visuals gave *Ocarina Of Time* a reputation as one of the darkest in the series, bar *Majora's Mask*.

## BILL GATES ANNOUNCES MICROSOFT XBOX

42

**2000** At E3 2000, the gaming industry landscape shifted forever. Bill Gates announced that Microsoft was smashing headlong into the console business, never to return. Xbox, originally codenamed DirectXbox, was MS's answer to PS2, a behemoth of a machine that symbolised raw American power, strength and dominance. Priced higher and launched later, the machine chipped away at PS2's leadership, carving itself out a comfortable share of the market.



## THE SIMS

43

**2000** With no clearly defined objectives, *The Sims* is as close to a true sandbox game as there's been. Inspired by the destruction of his home and possessions in the Oakland Firestorm of 1991, Will Wright's concept of a virtual dollhouse, where you are responsible for the happiness, lifestyle and aspirations of your own virtual family, is one that spoke to the hearts of the whole world and took simulation to new heights. *The Sims* gave PC gaming a much-needed shot in the arm, and attracted demographics – largely female – that may never have played a game otherwise. With more than 16 million units sold, the original is already the highest selling PC game of all time. The property is now a strong contender to supersede *Mario*.



## GRAND THEFT AUTO III

44

**2001** What more can be said about *Grand Theft Auto III*? The most important videogame in history? There's certainly an argument for it. The most influential game in history? It's certainly looking that way. *GTA III* is the title that threw gaming kicking and screaming into the mainstream, effectively invented the open-world genre and caused as much controversy as it did pick up awards. A truly marvellous integration of film reference, gameplay freedom, humour and incessantly brilliant game design, the *GTA III* template has gone on to spawn four sequels and dozens of clones, and is THE name in post-millennium gaming. The last few years of videogaming would have been very different without *GTA*. Better? Perhaps, but we'll put up with all of the lacklustre knock-offs for another slice of that Rockstar goodness.



## HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED

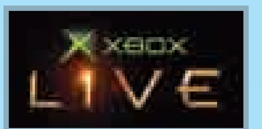
45

**2001** A controversial choice, perhaps, given *Halo's* relative infancy, but no one can dispute the impact Master Chief has had on the FPS genre and the industry as a whole. Single-handedly responsible for Xbox's early success, Bungie's masterful FPS raised the bar for graphics, sound, combat, AI and cinematic immersion, creating a sci-fi milestone. It's sequel has sold 7.4 million units worldwide, and despite failing to capture the imagination of some ardent *Halo* fans, is still the most played game on Xbox Live. With a Peter Jackson-backed movie in the works, along with its highly anticipated sequel and spin-off RTS *Halo Wars*, the legend is still going strong.

## THE BIRTH OF XBOX LIVE

47

**2002** Online gaming, previously the domain of PC gamers, finally became mainstream with the launch of Microsoft's magnificently designed Xbox Live service. The key to its success was accessibility – those previously daunted by Pings and IP addresses now had an idiot-proof key to the world of the deathmatch. Now integral to the 360 experience, Live has paved the way for online gaming to consume the home over the course of the next gen. With Live Anywhere to come – where PC players, mobile phone users and 360 owners can interact with the same online experience – the future looks bright.




## NINTENDO DS

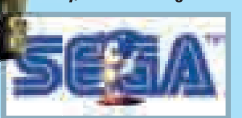
49

**2004** Not only significant for being released in the States before Japan, Nintendo DS has proven Nintendo's killer app this millennium. By placing the focus on how we play rather than what we play, DS's dual and touch screen technology has led to new genres, new franchises and many new gamers. The likes of *Nintendogs*, for example, has been a masterstroke in capturing the heart of the mainstream observer. The machine has already made an incredible impact on the industry, and it's going from strength to strength. Nintendo has mimicked the Apple model in releasing the gorgeous DS Lite, which mixes the machine's gaming prowess with genuinely attractive curves. DS is THE handheld, and will be for a number of years to come. Another Nintendo masterstroke.

## THE RISE AND FALL OF SEGA

46

**2001** Of all the industry giants to be toppled in the last 30 years, the fall of Sega was the most tragic. It was still producing top quality software when it decided to drop Dreamcast to go third-party. With a console designed for arcade-perfect ports and the first fully integrated online gaming service, Dreamcast was a real gamer's console. Sadly, bad marketing decisions and an apathetic public saw Sega's most promising console fall.




## VIDEOGAME CONTROVERSY – MANHUNT AND CO

48

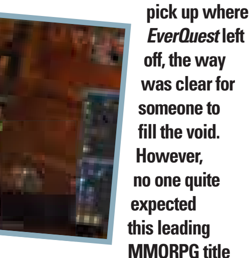
**2003** *Manhunt* raised the bar for the 'videogame nasty'. The conservative media blamed it for the murder of teenager Stefan Pakeerah by Warren LeBlanc. LeBlanc's mother claimed his obsession with the game had led to him commit the murderous act. *Manhunt* and Rockstar became the target of a media witch hunt, and despite the police denying any link between the game and the murder, the company was damned in the eyes of the conservative minority. Of course, Jack Thompson continued the 'good fight' by lambasting *Canis Canem Edit*. God bless the uneducated morals of those who don't understand our industry.



## WORLD OF WARCRAFT

50

**2004** For the last two years, Massively Multi-player Online Role-Playing has been utterly dominated by one game: Blizzard's *World Of Warcraft*. With the inevitable demise of Sony Online Entertainment's *EverQuest*, the game that brought commercial MMORPGs to the mainstream, and with the failure of *EverQuest II* to pick up where *EverQuest* left off, the way was clear for someone to fill the void. However, no one quite expected this leading MMORPG title to dwarf its nearest competitor to the extent that *World Of Warcraft* has. It boasts a subscribing membership in the millions and has spawned a culture of its own that spills beyond the boundaries of its own community into that of general videogaming.



# Almost Made It

**The videogame landmarks not worth contemplating…**

**CAPTAIN NOVOLIN – You Heard Us**
A superhero whose only 'power' is that he's diabetic. Progress through the levels by dodging aliens disguised as cakes, and picking up insulin before you crash. As bad as it sounds, but demands to be seen.

**IK+ – Trousers Down**
An undisputed classic, and a serious game in every respect – until you discover the button that miraculously drops your trousers. There's no obvious explanation for its inclusion, but boy are we happy it exists.

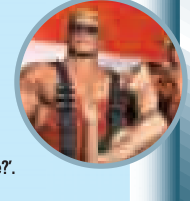
**SUPER MARIO BROS – The Movie**
A bad idea in the first place, the *Mario Bros* movie was so poorly executed it sank lower than anybody could have feared. The first big game-to-film adaptation, we can thank this for *Street Fighter*, *Mortal Kombat* and the collection of work from Uwe Boll.

**DRIV3R – Road To Nowhere**
The king of the crap heap, *Driv3r's* inexcusable number of game-shattering bugs earned it a serious amount of negative press (in most places). Bodies falling from the sky, invisible walls smashing up your bonnet… it's like taking a vacation in hell.

**MILES JACOBSON – Homewrecker**
The man behind the ingenious *Championship Manager*, and now *Football Manager* series is also the cause of 'more divorces than any other videogame'. 'Champ Man widows', as they're called, are an all-too-common side effect of the beautiful game.

**BOILING POINT – The Dangers Of Freelance**
Occasionally in this business, a freelancer will, let's say, 'not do a review justice': missing out all of *Boiling Point's* hideous flaws being a case in point. Arnold Vosloo alone does not a nine out of ten make. Lesson learned. Won't happen again.

**DUKE NUKEM 3D – Get 'em out**
The Duke wouldn't stop his arse-kicking session to chew bubblegum, but he would put carnage on ice for the laydees, wooing strippers into flashing their jubblies with dollar bills and sentiments such as 'shake it, baby' and 'wanna dance?'.



**MONKEY ISLAND INSULTS – Retort Sport**
*Monkey Island* was funny; sword fighting isn't. So, LucasArts came up with the idea of insult fighting using verbal alacrity rather than superior swordsmanship to cow your opponent. Genius.



**GAMES™ ISSUE ONE – Because we can…**
What? Surely you didn't expect us to leave this one out? We're not so arrogant as to put it in the top 50, but this mag is the best, and the two awards we received following the first issue warrant a mention. So there.




**VIRTUAL BOY – Virtual Toss**
If proof were needed that even Nintendo can make mistakes then this is it. It gave players terrible headaches and bore no resemblance to Virtual Reality. No wonder it lasted for less than a year.



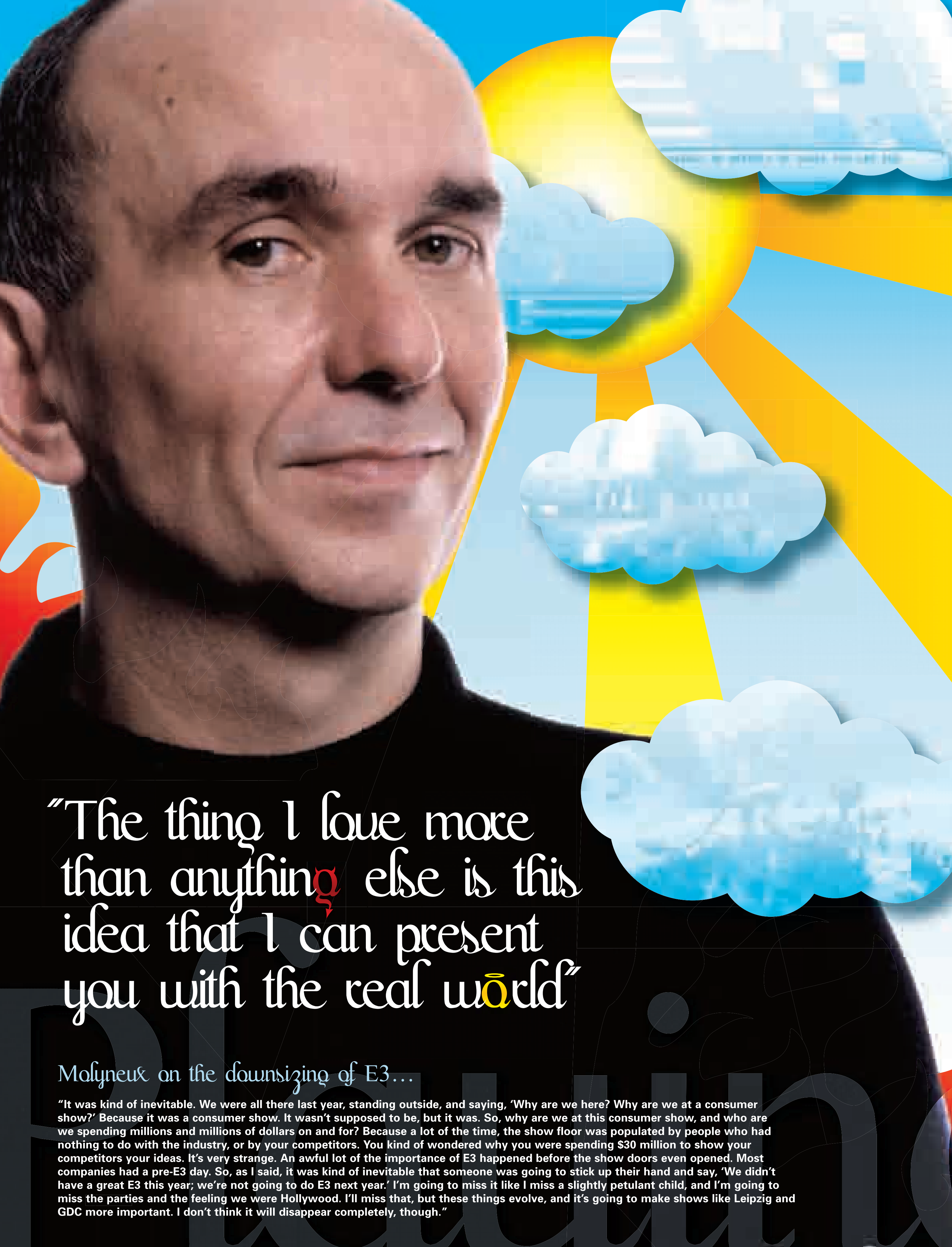


# Pl God

WORDS: **ALEXANDER GAMBOTTO-BURKE**

A man whose career defines ambition's advantages and pitfalls, Peter Molyneux is still pursuing game design evolution. This time though, he has a little help from his friends. He talks openly to games™ about those friends, his latest projects, and why it's not that fun being an independent developer





# "The thing I love more than anything else is this idea that I can present you with the real world"

## Molyneux on the downsizing of E3…

"It was kind of inevitable. We were all there last year, standing outside, and saying, 'Why are we here? Why are we at a consumer show?' Because it was a consumer show. It wasn't supposed to be, but it was. So, why are we at this consumer show, and who are we spending millions and millions of dollars on and for? Because a lot of the time, the show floor was populated by people who had nothing to do with the industry, or by your competitors. You kind of wondered why you were spending $30 million to show your competitors your ideas. It's very strange. An awful lot of the importance of E3 happened before the show doors even opened. Most companies had a pre-E3 day. So, as I said, it was kind of inevitable that someone was going to stick up their hand and say, 'We didn't have a great E3 this year; we're not going to do E3 next year.' I'm going to miss it like I miss a slightly petulant child, and I'm going to miss the parties and the feeling we were Hollywood. I'll miss that, but these things evolve, and it's going to make shows like Leipzig and GDC more important. I don't think it will disappear completely, though."

If there's one thing you can say for Peter Molyneux it's that although he may not always get it right, when he does he gives you the power. To sculpt landscapes, command unruly villagers, to enforce by any means necessary the will of a global, sinister corporation, even to literally spank a giant monkey into submission with the kind of force your average masochistic Tory minister would pay good money for. Where other game designers have you alone, your 'life' quantified into a hundred measly points, with a pack of dumb, ugly, angry aliens around the corner, Molyneux lets you reign in the heavens.

"The thing I love more than anything else," he muses, "is this idea that I can present you with the real world, where you are a real character in that real world, and then I can give you something in that world you could never do. And it's giving you that power – whether it's supernatural or just something you'd never do – that makes it so exciting. It's one thing to be powerful in a universe that has a completely different rule-set to your own; it's something else entirely to be able to do it in this world."

Molyneux's design philosophy doesn't stop at empowerment; he enjoys smashing boundaries, too. "I think it's about questioning what we think of as standards in the industry," he says. "I've got a real passion for thinking I've done it wrong in the past, and I'm going to do it right in the future. So, I never like to rest on my laurels. It's looking at some real standards like, for example, in one of the games we're working on now, we're not going to have any cut-scenes. We're not going to have any point where you're just staring at the screen. You want to be engaged and be in the world all the time, so it's questioning some big design precepts.

I'd say I'm very ambitious. I like to try and strive for the hard things rather than the easy things. I just had a design meeting the other day where some people were saying, 'Well, it's really hard, and no one's done it.' And that, for me, is the right thing to do because if you do it right it's a big win. Now, the problem with all that is that it's much easier to get it wrong than right. I very seriously look back on what I've done in the past, and I think you can point to some things, and say, 'Why the hell did you do that? Why did you push the team to do that?' But at the end of the day, you just need to learn from your mistakes."

**AND MOLYNEUX'S NOT** ashamed to confess those mistakes; he made a very famous and very public apology for *Fable*'s inadequacies. He admitted that it was not the game he had promised. Recently, he's been yodelling a similar tune with *Black & White 2*, although he says its flaws were the result of budget issues. "The unfortunate thing for an independent developer doing triple-A games," he sighs emphatically, "is that there's a double-bad blow. Your team size has to be much bigger because the games being produced by Sony or EA have 150 people or more; physically competing with those people is very hard when you have 50 people, so you have to increase your team size.

If you're not doing 'epic' games, that's not a problem," he continues, "but our passion has always been to produce 'epic', triple-A games, and that means our team's size gets bigger over time. Therefore, it was very expensive to run Lionhead, and when it's very expensive to run Lionhead, ultimately, it affects the games coming out. *Black & White 2* was the way it was, not because we were stupid or dumb but rather it was because it was costing us a vast amount of money to produce what we wanted, and it ended up being a third of the game it should have been."

You'll notice Molyneux is talking in the past tense about Lionhead's financial pickles. Tradition would lead us to believe it's because he's now packing shelves at Safeway, but the reality is that Lionhead has recently made the transition from third to first-party developer, and is now owned by Microsoft. Molyneux couldn't be happier. "One effect is that the crushing pressure of being an independent developer is being taken away. As I said, that crushing pressure was affecting the quality of our games. Microsoft want us to produce amazing, triple-A games […] and they want us to produce incredible moments in gaming. And they're enabling us to do that, largely, by taking away the pressure of being an independent developer, and also being closer to the family of developers. There is a worry that you lose that family feel, but the great thing Microsoft has said to us is, 'We don't want Lionhead to change its culture at all. We don't want to change the way it develops.' I mean, there's no one from Microsoft here."

**THE FIRST TITLE** Lionhead will be releasing under the Microsoft banner is *Fable 2*, a game that will embody Molyneux's dedication to righting his past wrongs. His main goal – with Microsoft's added financial assistance – is to make it the best RPG on the market. "What I say to the team is that, ultimately, our ambition is to create milestones in gaming. And I always get slightly misquoted on that. I always say it slightly wrong by saying, 'When we attempt to do a game, we try to make the best RPG, the best God sim, the best strategy game, and so on'. Personally, I don't see a point in making something if you just want it to be a 'very good' RPG. So, Lionhead's goal is just to surprise and entertain players. We're working on *Fable 2*, obviously, and I say, 'How can we get that sense of wonder that other people get in just a few games?' You know, that 'Oh, my God' moment – how can we get that in *Fable 2*? How can we get more interesting emotions out of people? How can we get them to care about something? How can we get them to be concerned about something?"

When we suggest that those questions must be harder to answer in the context of a sandbox game like *Fable* – in a genre whose characters and storylines tend to be spread very thinly – rather than, say, a point-and-click adventure, he immediately disagrees. "I really question that, actually. If a sandbox game – and by 'sandbox', I'm talking about simulation – simulated a family, and let's say that in that family I want the feeling of loving and care, the simulation would try and extract that emotion from you. If I said to you – and I'm not talking specifically about any upcoming game – 'Right, I'm going to have a game, and I'm going to make you a child in that game, and I'm going to give you a mother,' what can the simulation do to make you feel like that NPC is your mother? And that is far easier to get through simulation because it means you as a player can do things and test that out.

What happens if, for example, I go around the room, smashing things up, or if I come home with a cut on my face? What would the simulation – the mother character, that is – do?

The objective here is to make you feel like this is your mother, rather than a character. A point-and-click adventure is more about posing a character that is a mother, [whereas a simulation can] convince you that it's your mother. And maybe you can customise that – maybe you want your mother to have grey hair or size ten feet – and it may mean that you customise your mother's personality, but that's the real thing for a simulation: you allow the player to experiment with that relationship, and point-and-click adventures wouldn't let you do that."

**WHAT MOLYNEUX IS** proposing in terms of simulation may seem a little grandiose, but he's certain he has it all mapped out. "What we're trying to do procedurally has been the Holy Grail of academic AI research for the last 50 years, so how could we even have the audacity to attempt it? The answer is that it's what you can do as a player that limits those options. Like with a text adventure, you can only type in certain words, and so that limits what you can do. So, it's what you do as a player and what interface we give you that dictates what that actual simulation can do."

One of the main barriers to the kinds of ideas Molyneux dreams up also happens to be the axis of gaming's existence: technology. Although it's constantly advancing, and although the games we see today are infinitely more sophisticated than those of just ten years ago, technology remains the main force for compromise in innovative game design. And Molyneux agrees with this general summary.

"Technology often gets in the way," he admits. "It's also one of the biggest reasons why things take an awful long time. The problem with technology is that we're not using technology; we're inventing technology most of the time. I've never worked on a game where you've just got the necessary technology, and so that bit's done. It's always, 'Well, we did it this way in the last project so we need to redo it in this project because it didn't work perfectly'. It's always the most frustrating thing . It's like a film director working with a broken camera, or a camera that goes from black-and-white to colour all the time – you're never quite sure what you're going to get. In *Fable 2*, we're doing this amazing, incredible, never-been-done-before lighting system. I can't show it to you, but on paper it looks like it's going to make ours the most beautiful game ever. The frightening thing is that I can't see that until it's actually done."

**WHICH BRINGS MOLYNEUX** to his biggest frustration about being a game designer – you don't get to actually see that great idea you thought up on the toilet for a long, long time. "There's an incredible frustration that I have, and that's the enormously long pause between having an idea and seeing that idea. It's terrifyingly long. You can have an idea, and it can be two years before you see anything close to what you saw in your head. You need an incredible amount of patience, and you also need a good memory; you can forget what was so exciting about that idea in the first place. That sounds ridiculous, but an idea can come in a second, and not being able to see or touch or play with that idea for a long time can be very frustrating. We're actually trying to do something about that – I can't say too much about what that is, but it's a piece of technology called 'Concrete'. It has the ability to help us think of things less about being 'assets', and more about being 'components' combined together."

Development time isn't the only thing that gets Molyneux raging, he's also acutely aware of the current plight of British game developers. "[The British game industry] has had a really rough ride in the last five years. [It] was, for the longest time, centred on lots and lots of small, independent companies, and that's had a huge battering. I think there are a lot of British people hidden away, and a few international companies that are still having influence. I think – and this is a political point – it's sad that the British game industry hasn't been recognised for what it is and the contributions it's made by the government. I think the lack of government support has caused a lot of problems. There's some weird reason that there are so many people who love making computer games in Britain – maybe it's because the weather's so crap – but that passion for it is the main reason it's still around; I think it's sad that we haven't used that. If the industry had government support, Britain could remain a very strong player in global making of games. It's still there – Britain still produces *GTA*, and we've still got Rare and Rockstar, but it's less influential.

Also, a lot of it has to do with money or money-related things. It's finding the money to do the projects you want. There are many people who have the ideas, but because the costs keep going up, it's harder to be independent. Developers are reluctant to come up with new ideas, and because of that, publishers who used to think of independent developers as the people who came up with lots of ideas, now see them as the people who come up with less ideas – they may also go bust during production of one of the publisher's games. […] Just asking someone to come and work for this business is a lot now because people in the industry are getting older. Looking around where I'm sitting at the moment, I'd say half the people have families, or are at least married, and you can't take the risks you used to take. You have to think, 'Am I going to be able to feed my children, or is this company going to go bust?'"

**WITH THIS IN** mind, Molyneux has some advice for up-and-coming British developers. He believes if you're starting up an independent company, there are a few things you absolutely need to do. "The first thing you should do is have a long-term plan. You know: 'We want to produce a triple-A, epic game in the next ten years.' But don't expect that plan to happen overnight. If I were a small developer, I'd look very seriously at Live Arcade, those PC-downloadable games, and so on – making small steps to a big goal. If you're starting as a dev team, you need a strong designer, a strong programmer, and a strong artist, but also you need a strong businessperson. However, if you have a brilliant artist, for example, don't make that person the businessperson, otherwise they'll spend all the time doing business and none of the time being creative. If you're doing your first smaller game, think about who's going to buy your game, and why they're going to download it. That's the most important thing to think about before even going to a publisher. And don't lose sight of that long-term goal – everything you do should be, in some tiny way, a step towards that goal."

Even if his words don't spark a revolution in British game development, at the very least we'll still have Molyneux's titles to enjoy. If *Fable 2* is half as emotionally and technologically sophisticated as he's made it sound, Lionhead may finally have the game that cements them as a formidable and innovative developer. If it's not – which, given Molyneux's ambitions and history, is admittedly possible – there are always his past outings. They may be dating a bit these days, but they still have an undeniably addictive quality – they give you the power. 



## Molyneux on Steam and digital distribution…

**"I think Steam is interesting. I've used Steam, and especially more recently it's become much more interesting. For a very long time it was just *Half-Life 2*, and that's all there was. It's getting more interesting now that there are a few more games up there. Ultimately though, what do I want as a consumer? I want a place to go where I can get good-value games. And with the PC, there are a multitude of places to download games. If you type 'download games' into your web browser, you'll come up with 10,000 places where you can do that. What we want is one or two places, not 10,000 places. Steam is exciting. If they can get triple-A games on there, it becomes very exciting. I can certainly see that downloadable content is going to be much, much more significant on consoles and on PC, and developers will be designing games that cater to that."**

# REVIEWS



## THE AVERAGE

Scoring's a messy business when it comes to videogames, so we keep things as simple as possible here at games™. Marking out of a possible ten, a game that is decidedly average will score five – that doesn't necessarily mean it's bad, just that it doesn't do anything particularly special against its peers. We also refuse to bow to PR pressure, meaning that scores are our genuine opinion: we sing the praises of the great games and give the lesser ones the scorn they deserve. You might not always agree with us, but we're just trying to help – after all, everyone has an opinion, right?

## REFERENCE KIT

All the PC content for the magazine is tested on the über-specced Alienware Area-51™ 7500 extreme performance desktop PC. For information on Alienware products, point your browsers to www.alienware.co.uk or call them freephone on 0800 279 9751.





# DARK MESSIAH OF MIGHT AND MAGIC

## IT'S GOOD BEING BAD

**DETAILS**



**FORMAT REVIEWED**
PC

**ORIGIN**
France

**PUBLISHER**
Ubisoft

**DEVELOPER**
Arkane Studios

**PRICE**
£34.99

**RELEASE**
Out Now

**PLAYERS**
1 (2-32 Online)

**MINIMUM SPEC**
Pentium/Athlon 2.6 GHz, 512MB RAM, 128MB graphics, 16-bit sound

**"Guns for show, knives for a pro." These are infamous words of Soap, the offbeat chef in *Lock Stock And Two Smoking Barrels*.** The film itself is a somewhat tenuous link for a fantasy-action role-playing game review, but Soap's vaguely psychotic sentiment resonates when playing *Dark Messiah Of Might And Magic*. Staunch first-person shooter gamers have a surplus of quality titles to choose from, but graphic melee combat is in short supply. Those who enjoy the feel of a sword hilt made sticky with warm blood and the satisfying marriage of sharp steel and soft flesh have been hanging on since Codemasters' *Severance: Blade Of Darkness* in 2002, with little in the way of satisfaction from 3DO's lame attempt at its own *Might And Magic* ARPG. In the many months following *Dark Messiah's* announcement last year, we've been drip fed a tantalising amount of detail; we've played the multi-player betas and a mean demo – an unabashed statement of confidence by Ubisoft that it thinks its revival of what was a shaky 3DO franchise is the real deal. Arkane has entered into *Dark Messiah* blessed with assets beyond that of most developers – so we entered the world of Ashan with considerable anticipation and high expectations.

Wading straight into *Dark Messiah*, swinging your blade and cracking off the odd fireball will not get you creamed in combat in the early stages of the game and certainly not in the tutorial stage. The controls are intuitive and simple – kick, attack, block and move – with none of the complex combinations required to learn in *Severance*; just hold down the attack and directional button for a power strike in the appropriate direction. With the plethora of strategically placed wall spikes, support struts, precarious precipices and blazing fires, you'll soon realise that you're being encouraged to toy mercilessly with the cocky blackguards that you'll encounter and make them choke on their empty threats. After all, where's the fun in honourable combat when you can lead your stupid enemy under that conveniently overburdened shelf, kick the supports out and drop a ton of barrels on him? Or boot the unsuspecting idiot over a cliff? Or douse him in oil,

**"YOU'LL REALISE THAT YOU'RE BEING ENCOURAGED TO TOY MERCILESSLY WITH THE COCKY BLACKGUARDS THAT YOU'LL ENCOUNTER AND MAKE THEM CHOKE ON THEIR EMPTY THREATS"**

Level your combat skill to execute two consecutive adrenaline strikes.





"I think I've got the eyelash… Ooops."

**games™**

## FINGERPRINT

**WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE**

**SELF-CONSCIOUS:** Look. You can see your feet. You're not a floating torso any more.

**ANGER MANAGEMENT:** Let the rage take hold of you as your adrenaline bar maxes out.

How to retrieve your weapon from a burning ghoul.



## CAUSING HAVOK

**In the game's early development, Arkane's concept for a sequel to its cult RPG *Planescape: Torment* attracted the interest of Valve and its *Half-Life 2* engine. This has been enhanced for *Dark Messiah* and has lent it an impressive degree of realism. The physics that made *Half-Life 2* revolutionary might not have the same impact as several years ago, but it has the same captivating effect on your game. Rag-doll enables corpses to flap around realistically, objects will never bounce or roll around the same way twice and you can rely on the virtual gravity doing its job when dropping large amounts of timber on unsuspecting baddies.**



The very, very, very, very, very hungry caterpillar.



Manic half-demon versus puny goblin. Place your bets.



This is Xana in her human form. You don't want to see her angry.



Your adrenaline is maxed and the next baddie is chopped beef.

set him alight and watch him flail about, screaming in agony? You will have ample opportunity to wield fancy swordplay and strategic spellcasting later on; the first few chapters of *Dark Messiah* are all about learning how to enjoy the dark and visceral martial pleasures that the environment offers in abundance.

Of course, while the sadistic novelty of torturing your foes never really wears off, you're sometimes limited to dispatching them with the more traditional methods of magic and steel. This is equally gratifying once you've levelled up a little and acquired new combat and magical skills, and even more rewarding with the occasional adrenal rush. Arkane has implemented an adrenaline bar, a simple and effective device that encourages you to enter battle with frenetic gusto. Score enough blows in combat and your adrenaline bar will max out. This gives you the ability to perform an ultimately powerful manoeuvre whose effects range from impaling or beheading enemies, to shrinking them to miniscule proportions with a weaken spell before squashing them underfoot. It's brutal, gratuitous fun and while you never truly feel immortal, during the final stages you'll find yourself able to storm a roomful of enemies and unleash hell with scant regard for your own health, especially once you have acquired Xana's demonic powers.

This emphasis on action belies *Dark Messiah's* role-playing side, which carefully underpins your approach to combat. Despite the limited range of artefacts on offer and the rather basic inventory compared with a fully fledged RPG, the skill point system pushes you down a strict specialist, dual-class or generalist role with the pros and cons associated with them all. Purist mages and

### FAQs

**Q. WHY THE MIGHT AND MAGIC SUFFIX?**
It's part of the *Might And Magic* franchise. Both *Heroes Of Might And Magic V* and *Dark Messiah* are linked by storyline and characters.

**Q. WHAT'S THE STAMINA BAR?**
It drains rapidly when using kicks, power moves or sprinting and stops you using them until it has regenerated.

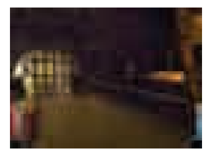
**Q. WHAT'S THE COLLECTOR'S EDITION?**
One for the fans – it includes a small DVD documentary, bonus multi-player game content and soundtrack.

## "HAVING CARVED A TRAIL OF WANTON VIOLENCE THROUGH THE FIRST FEW CHAPTERS OF MEDIEVAL CASTLE SERFDOM AND GLOOMY ORCISH CAVERNS, IT'S ARKANE'S TALENT FOR POWERFUL STORYTELLING THAT WILL CARRY THE GAME FORWARD"



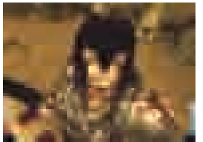

**THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM**

55 MINS



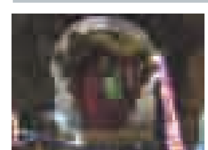
It's been immense fun but a bit of a breeze up until now. It's uphill from here on though, and for the next couple of levels you're going to be Leanna's dogsbody.

20 HOURS



This is Aratrock, the orc shaman who you will be taking on somewhere midway through the game. He doesn't like magic and he's quite fond of using you as a dumb-bell.

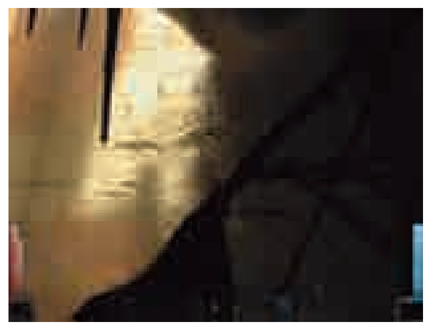
4 DAYS



Think you can take on the worm? Forget it, it's impervious even to your best efforts and it's evidently got bad breath too. Run for your life or pray for a giant crow.

assassins definitely need a backup of skills from one of the other disciplines, but even though fighters fare the best as a strict specialist, all three benefit greatly from some degree of dual-class. Arkane has ensured that weak fire and ice spells can still be an option for a fighting role when used as an ice slick to cause enemies to topple, or as a source of ignition once enemies are covered in oil. So we found a fighter with reasonably developed magic skills to be a very effective combination and, more importantly, crucial in keeping combat varied and interesting.

It may all sound fairly brainless so far, but there is a degree of thought that needs to be put behind combat against multiple intelligent foes; especially monstrous single enemies like the Pow-Kai and Cyclopes. However, having carved a trail of wanton violence through the first few chapters of medieval castle serfdom and gloomy orcish caverns, it's Arkane's talent for powerful storytelling that will carry the game forward once your bloodlust has been sated… especially by the time you've been through the Temple of the Spider and laid waste to a legion of zombies. The supporting cast of intriguing characters and frequent dialogue never ceases to entertain, and your own character has a fascinating evolution as *Dark Messiah* progresses, from a stoically moral white knight to a remarkably grey anti-hero. Your

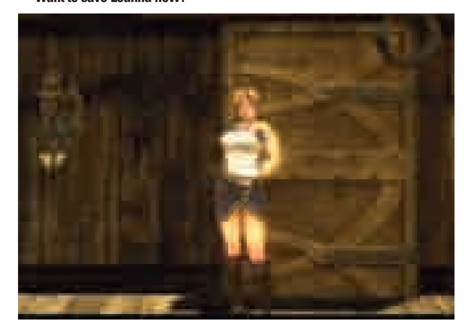


*Dark Messiah's* versatile rope-bow is useful for reaching secret stashes.

demonic counterpart, Xana, constantly provides a black commentary on your actions, mocking the demise of the weak at your hands, praising your numerous monumental victories and hissing enviously at the coquettish Leanna, who fawns over you at every opportune moment. In tribute to its RPG roots, the plot diverges in *Dark Messiah* – rescuing Leanna being an optional objective – which ultimately has implications in your choice as to whether you wish to shun or embrace your demonic heritage at the end of the game. Xana is unsurprisingly keen on leaving Leanna to her horrible fate.

There's very little that lets *Dark Messiah* down, but the single-player story has some poignant moments of disappointment that detract from a near-perfect gaming experience. *Dark Messiah's* total body awareness is one of them. Though we appreciate the fact that for one of the first times in a first-person game we can see our feet, the realistic bobbing movement and your body's momentum is difficult to predict when

You should have listened to Xana. Do you really want to save Leanna now?





Ghouls are fast, tough and dangerous in packs.

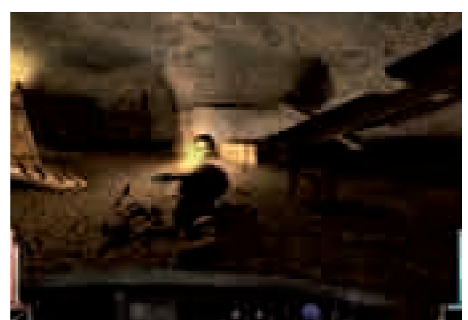
GLOBAL

TAKING GAMING ONLINE

**CALL OF MIGHT AND MAGIC:** Multi-player is effectively *Call Of Duty* with a fantasy theme. Here's where all those character classes that you didn't really play in single-player become useful.

## DEVIL MAY CARE

**Xana, who does a great job of being your seductive succubus, will grant you the ability to tap into her powers and let your demonic ancestry assert itself. Accessed by tapping a single button, it's a bit like picking up a Berserk Pack in *Doom*: a red veil drops across your vision and you temporarily forsake all weapons in return for astonishing speed, agility and powerful blows. You also grow a fetching pair of claws, handy for rending soft flesh from bone. The only drawback is that it drains your stamina bar for a time after the metamorphosis. Ensure you waste your enemies before returning to human form.**



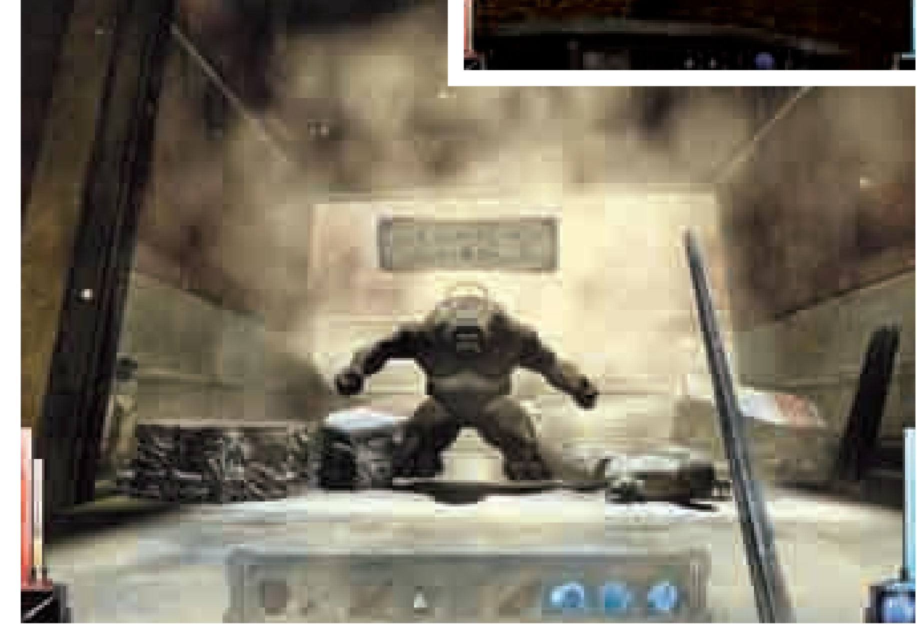



■ "Did something go wrong? Whatever gave us that idea?"

you're making fine movements with a mouse and keyboard, and side-stepping a haymaking cleaver swing often comes down to luck, forcing you to rely heavily on your shield. Timing a jump is even more difficult; the less said about 'crossing the broken pillars to avoid the giant worm' in one of the later levels, the better.

Also, while your character is aware of his own body, your companions are often completely oblivious to your presence. Bar the scripted events, they will sometimes refuse to follow you, will shoot projectiles through you, and have an annoying habit of stepping between you and your combatant – made even more infuriating when one of the level failure requisites is pissing that particular character off. It's fortunate that you'll be soloing for the best part of the game, so it doesn't detract too much from *Dark Messiah*'s otherwise compulsive gameplay.

Besides, Arkane Studios would have had to have made a spectacular hash of *Dark Messiah* to fluff it up as it had such a rock-solid foundation to begin with. You'd be right in thinking that a studio with a reputation for compelling storytelling, an award-winning engine and the backing of a publisher with considerable financial and marketing muscle sounds like the recipe for a real success. The variety of incredible vistas and visuals, simple yet engrossing plot and sheer depth of gameplay is guaranteed to entertain action fans. *Dark Messiah* has the uncanny ability to tap into the primeval bloodlust of anyone that devotes more than a few minutes to it. A resounding success.



■ You don't have to complete the optional objectives, but they're fun and good for a few skill points.



**VERDICT 8/10**
BRUTALLY GOOD FUN

CRUSADERS OF MIGHT AND MAGIC



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



GOD OF WAR

# SPLINTER CELL DOUBLE AGENT

## SAM'S LATEST IS STUCK IN THE PAST

**DETAILS**



**FORMAT REVIEWED**
Xbox 360

**OTHER FORMATS:**
PlayStation2, Xbox, PC, GameCube, Wii

**ORIGIN**
China

**PUBLISHER**
Ubisoft

**DEVELOPER**
In-House

**PRICE**
£49.99

**RELEASE**
Out Now

**PLAYERS**
1-6 Online

**As we head toward the second year of the so-called console 'next gen', it's increasingly apparent which games have been developed specifically for the new consoles.** The likes of *Kane & Lynch*, *Oblivion* and *Dead Rising* have proved that when freed from the constraints of current-gen technology, Xbox 360 can thrive. *Splinter Cell Double Agent*, though, falls directly into the other camp – this is an old-gen game dressed in next-gen clothes, and signals the first stutter in Sam Fisher's career.

While on the surface *Double Agent* is visually outstanding, there's a noticeable lack of substance to its delectably lit environments. Modern combat has evolved so the lack of physics, destructible environments or emergent enemy AI has left the game stuck in the past. In order to combat this potential malaise, Ubisoft Shanghai has toyed with the formula that has made *Splinter Cell* such a success. As the *Double Agent* subtitle suggests, the latest *Cell* sees Fisher deep undercover, working simultaneously for the NSA – Lambert and all – and for a terrorist organisation known as the John Brown Alliance, or JBA.

After placing our hero in a maximum-security prison, Lambert tasks Sam with befriending a (thankfully non-Muslim) terrorist, and breaking him out of prison. From that point on, two bars positioned at the bottom left of the screen represent the 'trust' of each organisation Sam works for. Actions taken will increase or decrease each bar respectively, so should you miss an NSA objective, or indeed act suspiciously in the company of JBA soldiers, you'll lose trust. The system has been designed to represent Fisher's, and the player's, moral struggle – killing a guard may help you maintain cover, but will it upset the NSA? It certainly adds a new twist to the traditional themes of stealth and assassination.

Or maybe it would if it wasn't so contrived. If either of the bars fully deplete, the mission is over, so any illusion of morality is shattered – you must carry out the game's chosen path in order to succeed. Obviously there is leeway, but *Splinter Cell* has always offered choice in how you execute each of its set pieces; this enforced morality just feels like an unnecessary add-on. Also, it can prove a major hindrance to success: some missions will end if you are spotted by certain NPCs, causing endless frustration as you try to determine just who needs to be avoided with extra vigilance.

It doesn't help that *Double Agent* is impenetrably harsh. *Splinter Cell* has never been an easy videogame, requiring saint-like patience and strong special awareness, but this is just too much. The story dictates that Fisher will be denied certain parts of his equipment during missions in order to maintain cover. So, you'll be sneaking around without either night vision, a gun or the

**FAQs**

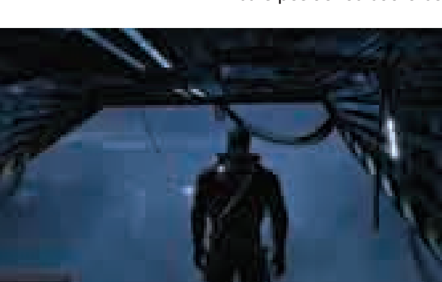
**Q. HOW MANY MISSIONS?**
11 in total, each harder than the last.

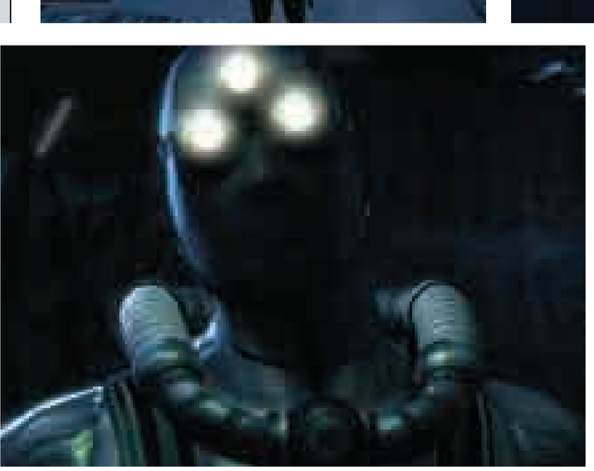
**Q. NO HUD?**
No, your sneaking is now governed by an LED on Sam's back.

**Q. AND THAT WORKS?**
We'd have preferred *Chaos Theory's* sound meter, but it's unfussy and reasonably successful.

**MULTIFORMAT**

**PLAYSTATION2 [£39.99]**
Despite the 360 version feeling like a last-generation game, *Double Agent* on PS2 is actually completely different. The missions, HUD and even hacking mini-games have changed. In fact, the two only have one thing in common – they're both ridiculously difficult.





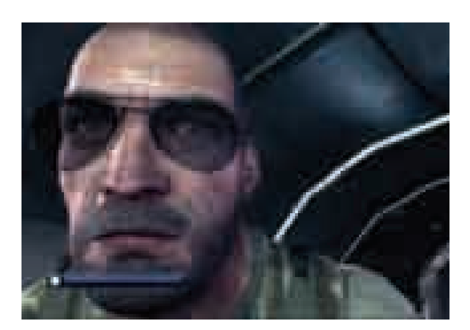
Many levels open with a semi-interactive cut-scene, from parachuting to guiding an out-of-control chopper to a city rooftop.



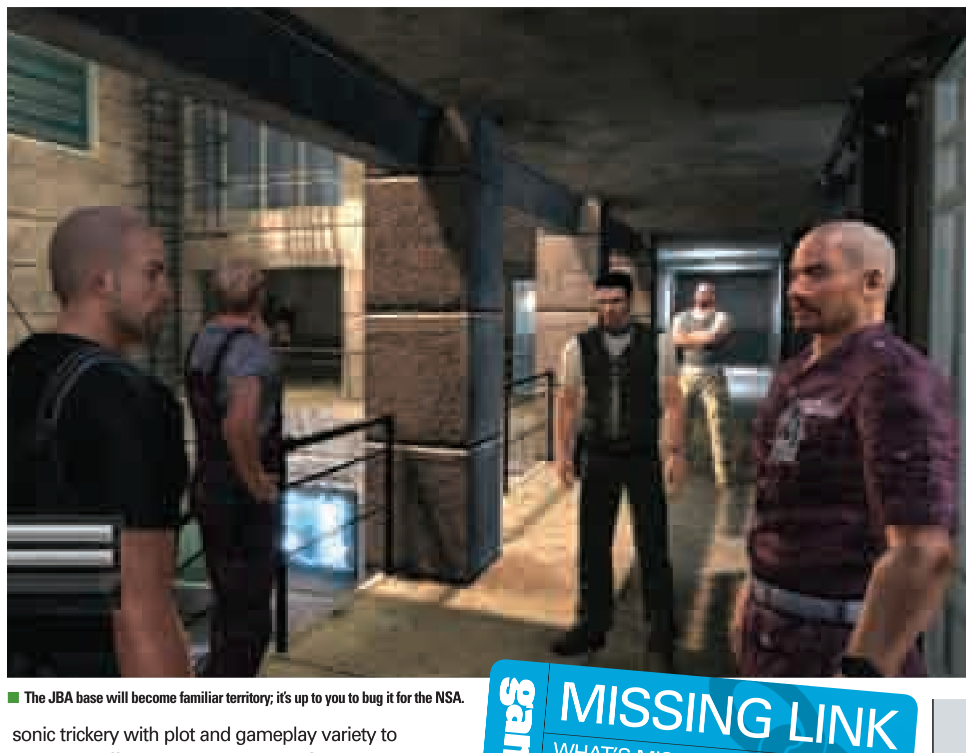
The Shanghai hotel descent provides one of *Double Agent's* highlights, mixing visual splendour with nail-biting tension.

## MORALITY BITES

**As is the way with many modern games, *Splinter Cell Double Agent* forces players to make moral choices which will impact the eventual outcome of the story. A perfect example comes at the end of Fisher's first visit to JBA HQ. In classic movie style, Sam is asked to put a bullet in an innocent man's head – cue a first-person view and a shaky hand clutching a pistol. You've only one bullet. Who do you side with? Shoot the man and dive deeper undercover, or deliberately miss and arouse their suspicions? It's up to you, and the game's ending will change accordingly. Just don't forget which way's up.**



Fisher looks gooood in his new shades. And a bit like Mr Potato Head.



The JBA base will become familiar territory; it's up to you to bug it for the NSA.

permission to kill anyone far too often, turning affairs into a *Manhunt*-style hide-and-seek-fest. *Splinter Cell's* success arose from Fisher's ability to turn a seemingly impassable situation into one where he had the advantage – his clinical removal of light sources combined with his bleeding-edge technology turned him from the hunted into the hunter. *Double Agent* constantly flirts with disaster by denying fans this empowering upper hand.

This is exacerbated by the times *Double Agent* does let you enter full-flow Fisher mode. The enhanced visuals, sound and stunning weather effects mean that when crouching behind a low wall in the shade, with the lime-green of night vision coating the camera lens and an unsuspecting guard in your pistol's iron sights, it's still a tremendously engaging interactive experience. Tension, always a hallmark of the series, returns in spades, increased during Sam's more fragile, weaponless moments and as thrilling as ever.

Not unlike the numerous set pieces, moments of high action or unbearable anxiety mix graphical and sonic trickery with plot and gameplay variety to mesmeric effect – particularly in the Shanghai hotel descent or the 'cleaning up' of the Siberian tanker. Occurrences such as these have always separated *Splinter Cell* from the pack, conjuring up moments of cinematic immersion that the stealth also-rans can only dream of. *Splinter Cell* is still a great game – it's just a great game in cryostasis, doggedly refusing to move with the times.

And that's *Double Agent's* greatest problem. Instead of progressing videogame stealth action, it's a game gone into hiding – cowering behind a shroud of misguided pseudo-innovation and unbelievable difficulty. Disappointing, but only because a next-gen *Splinter Cell* could have been so much more. For now, we'll have to put up with the same old Fisher in a sparkling new suit. And there are far worse things.



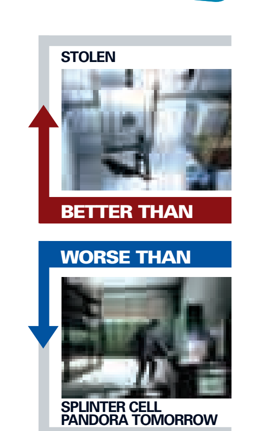

THE START OF A SLUMP FOR FISHER?

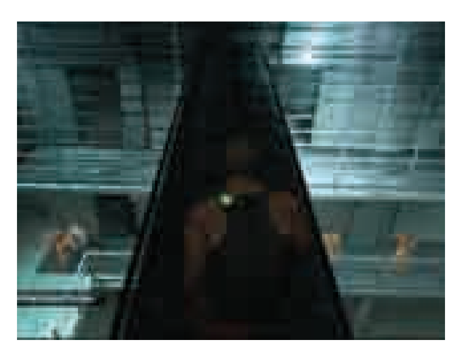
## MISSING LINK

games™

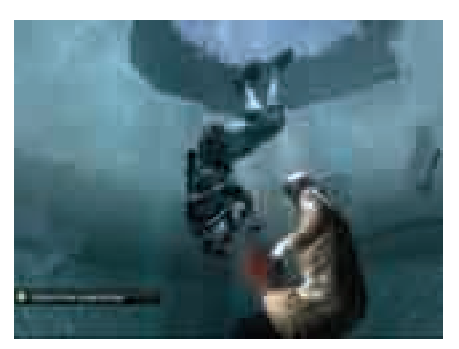
WHAT'S MISSING FROM THIS TITLE

**BETWEEN GENERATIONS:** The lack of a decent physics engine or destructible environments leave *Double Agent* stuck in the past – a next-gen version of a last-gen game.

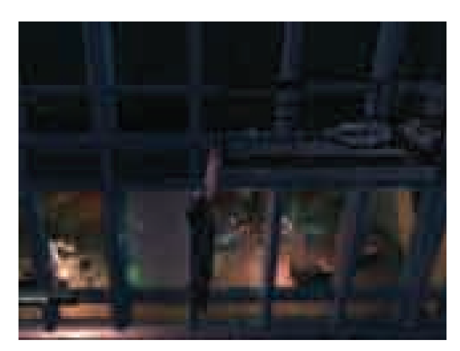


Inmates and guards fight in the prison level, but it's heavily scripted.



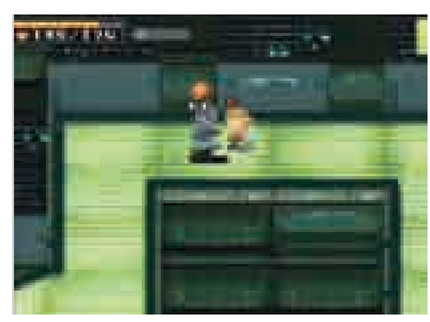
Sam's new ability to drag people through the ice proves very helpful.



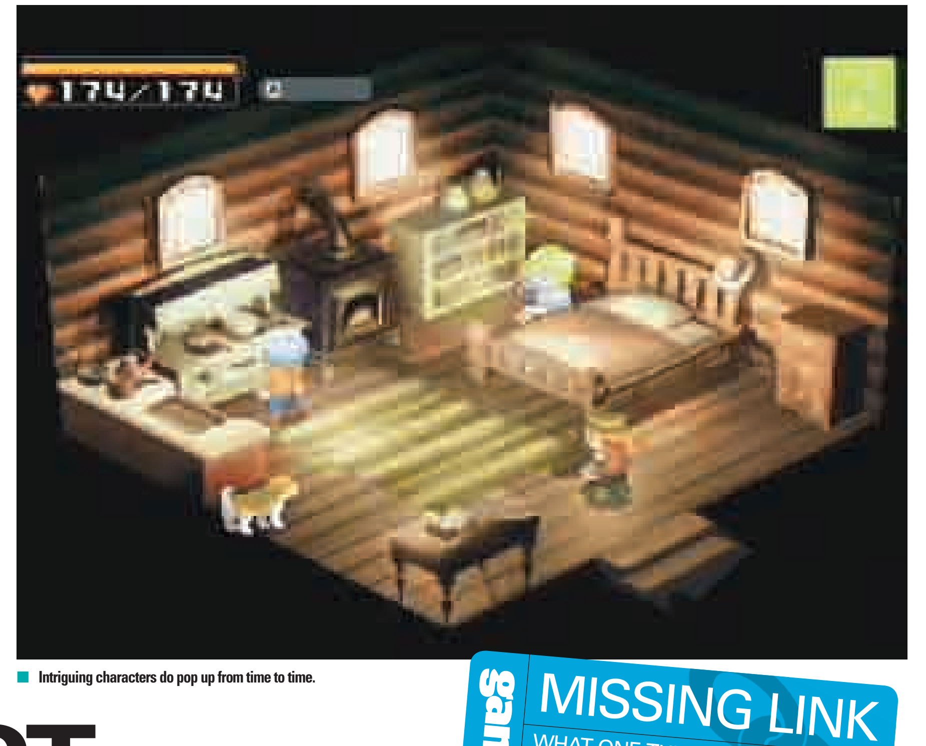
Will he be hanging on for dear life when the game's sales figures come in?



Changing clothes can alter stats and add new abilities.



Combat is controlled well, but can feel dull and repetitive.



Intriguing characters do pop up from time to time.

# CONTACT

## GET IN TOUCH WITH GRASSHOPPER'S LATEST GAME…

**MISSING LINK**

WHAT ONE THING WOULD YOU

**LINK UP:** *Shining Soul II* featured a decent four-player Co-op mode, which would have worked perfectly on the Wi-Fi-equipped DS. If only Grasshopper had included it this time around.

**DETAILS**



**FORMAT REVIEWED**
Nintendo DS

**ORIGIN**
Japan

**PUBLISHER**
Rising Star Games

**DEVELOPER**
Grasshopper Manufacture/ Marvelous Interactive

**PRICE**
£29.99

**RELEASE**
24 November

**PLAYERS**
1

**Amid all the excitement surrounding the production of Grasshopper Manufacture's first DS game, it's easy to lose sight of the fact that *Contact* is made by its handheld division, and therefore has very little to do with the enigmatic Suda 51.** As a result, this action-RPG has more in common with its previous portable effort, *Shining Soul II*, than either *killer7* or the forthcoming *Project Heroes*. Fans of the ludicrously bizarre prepare to be let down because, for the most part, *Contact* is a very average and disappointingly generic RPG.

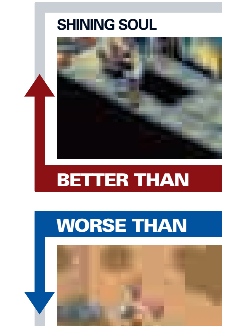
As it's built from a modified version of the *Shining Soul* engine, *Contact* excels in all the same areas. Plenty of secret passages exist for the more patient explorer to unearth, while hundreds of secret weapons and items will reward those who take the time to slay every monster. Sadly, Marvelous' effort has also contracted all of its ancestor's flaws. The main offender? The difficulty level. It's so steep that each dungeon must be replayed several times before the main character is strong enough to pass through unscathed. Playing for long periods can therefore lead to a staccato pace that gradually divorces the player from action, to the point where you'll merely go through the motions just to get to the next boss or story section. Also, the new features that have been built into *Contact* further compound the problems inherent in the source engine. The stylus control is intuitive but too imprecise, especially when trying to target specific monsters in a close-knit group, and the twin-screen dichotomy between the hero and his ever-watchful mentor feels horribly under-used, except during dialogue scenes.

These scenes are worth persevering with however. While not as quirky as Grasshopper's console titles, *Contact* delivers cut-scenes and conversations loaded with humour tailored toward videogame fans. Everything from *MGS* to Sony's E3 2006 press conference are lampooned during the course of events, culminating in a story that will encourage game fanatics to continue when others would lose interest.

Those who do soldier on will find that the most compelling elements of the game are the fishing and cooking side-quests – contributed by *Harvest Moon* developer Marvelous – as well as the decals which can be peeled and pasted onto the screen to temporarily alter the game's status. Such highlights are fleeting at best however, and are little consolation for the many glaring flaws that hold *Contact* back from being a great game. If only as much imagination had been applied to the gameplay as the narrative.



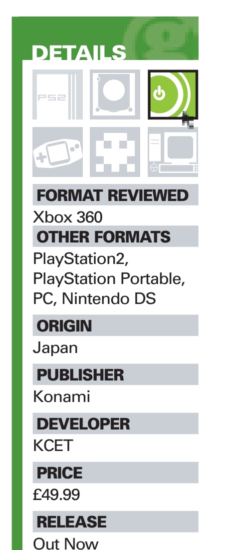
**VERDICT 5/10**
A GAMER'S RPG – FOR THE HARDCORE




eMag

# PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 6

## THE SEABASS LEGACY GOES NEXT-GEN



DETAILS

**FORMAT REVIEWED**
Xbox 360

**OTHER FORMATS**
PlayStation2, PlayStation Portable, PC, Nintendo DS

**ORIGIN**
Japan

**PUBLISHER**
Konami

**DEVELOPER**
KCET

**PRICE**
£49.99

**RELEASE**
Out Now

**PLAYERS**
1-4

**Perhaps it's unfair to expect a revolution. After all, Konami's masterful *Pro Evolution Soccer* has undergone only minimal changes for half a decade now, but it's impossible not to feel underwhelmed by the series' debut on Xbox 360.** With nearly a year of development time and a wealth of processing power like never before, it's disappointing to have to describe *PES6* as a slightly prettier, widescreen version of the PS2 game, especially when 2K Sports' gorgeous basketball sim *NBA 2K7* is reviewed in the very same issue.

Player models look less realistic than before – the added detail and normal mapping turning Rooney and company into a Madame Tussaud's freakshow. The lack of cloth physics is also inexcusable; every other sports game on Xbox 360 has shorts and shirts flowing in the breeze – so why not the greatest sports title of them all? And finally, the decision to maintain eight-directional control is questionable to say the least, especially as 360's D-pad is nigh on unusable.

Similarly dismaying are the single-player options. In light of *FIFA*'s excellent and weighty management mode, one would hope that the Master League would have undergone a significant overhaul. Sadly, this couldn't be further from the truth; what was once a refreshing and novel way to play *PES* has become dated and tiresome. And it's not helped by the CPU opposition AI, which flits between moments of brilliance and incredible stupidity with alarming regularity.

There's one beacon of light amid all of this crushing negativity though, and it's shining very bright. This, despite all of its shortcomings, is the finest version of *Pro Evo* ever conceived. Yes, it really is that good. Player movement, shooting, passing, defending, referees, goalkeepers… every single aspect of the game is better than before, leading to some magnificent passing moves and wonderful goals. *PES6* starts with the *Winning Eleven 10* template and improves on it in every area so long passes, crosses, one-twos and lay-offs are tremendous, but you'll now have to ensure passes are brought under control either with a tug of the right trigger to trap, or the right bumper to run onto the ball. It's quite a sight to see a player let the ball pass between his legs before cracking off a shot with his right foot – the depth of

**FAQs**

**Q. WHICH TEAMS ARE LICENSED?**
It's now Manchester United and not Chelsea in the prem, but the majority of the other leagues are all present and correct.

**Q. XBOX LIVE?**
We'll have the full online review next month – hopes are high.

**Q. HOW DOES IT CONTROL ON THE 360 PAD?**
Not quite as well as on PS2, but it's close.

FIFA 07



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



THE TARGET RENDERS

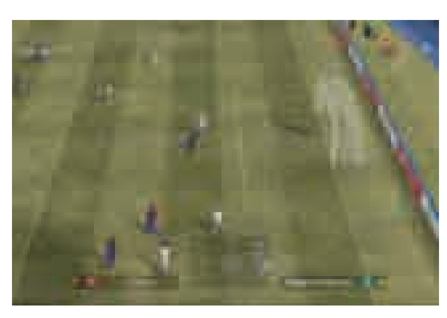
**X GENERATION**

WHAT'S THE DIFFEREENCE BETWEEN GENERATIONS

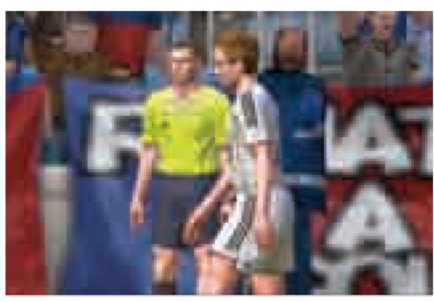
**PASS AND MOVE:** Player animation is marginally better than on PlayStation2, as is movement and team-mate artificial intelligence, but not significantly so.




The penalty system is as hit and miss as ever.



Giving Eto'o this much space in the box is tantamount to suicide.



Uncanny valley? The PSOne-looking crowd don't gel with Becks' good looks.

control available to seasoned players is simply unparalleled. *Pro Evo* doubters should head toward the instruction manual and open up a treasure chest of tricks, tactics and skills because the argument that players have no control over proceedings is moribund – *PES6* simply demands you earn every goal you score.

Likewise, dribbling with the ball has come on in leaps and bounds. Timing and quickness of thought have always taken precedence over elaborate tricks in *PES*, but in keeping with trends in the modern game, *Pro Evo 6* comes complete with a full complement of flicks, drag-backs, step-overs and shimmies. Just as the likes of Cristiano Ronaldo, Aaron Lennon and even Mr Rooney himself look set to dominate football for years to come, their penchant for running with the ball is ably captured in the latest *PES*. A swift 'waggle' of the analogue stick can send defenders darting in the wrong direction, and a truly skilful dribbler can score the types of wonder-goals even Giggs would be proud of.

This is not to suggest players will simply walk through defences. There's a noticeable increase in physicality, so Nesta and Ayala can comfortably shoulder lighter strikers off the ball. One-on-one situations – attacker versus defender – are now a battle of strength, timing and tenacity, so holding 'pressure' will no longer suffice. This increases the value of players like Makélélé and Hargreaves, as forcing strikers off the ball is now just as viable as a perfect slide from a centre back. It's extremely satisfying to barge a player into touch with a well-timed squeeze of the right trigger.

And yes, while we're steadily breaking down *PES6* into its component parts, the shooting has also been refined to within an inch of its life. At first it appears wild with seemingly simple efforts flying into the stands, and open goal misses that Jenas would be proud of, but only when you realise the intricacies of the system does goalscoring become natural. And 'natural' is indeed the word – the distance between ball and boot, the angle of approach, the speed of the player and his preferred shooting foot all have to be considered when hitting the ball. Skilled players will be able to pick out the top corners with controlled curlers and lob keepers from 40 yards. Novices will most certainly not.

All of the above results in a staggeringly entertaining game of multi-player football. The drama of the sport, as always, is captured perfectly with improved stadium effects and remarkably tolerable commentary, but it's the sheer elation of a last-minute winner or a 40-yard screamer that has kept us playing year upon year, and it's no different here.

Which leaves a peculiar conundrum: a score of eight for the finest version of *Pro Evolution Soccer* yet – a game that traditionally receives a **games**™ nine out of ten. It all comes back to this feeling of being thoroughly underwhelmed. Given the sports simulations that have decorated 360 so far, there's an inescapable sense of yearning for what could have been. An evolution is no longer enough.



THE BEST YET, BUT WE DESERVE MORE

## FREE FLOWING

**In keeping with the pace and crispness of its passing game, *Pro Evolution Soccer 6* includes a handy 'quick free kick' option for fouls in the middle of the pitch. Pressing the left and right bumpers automatically restarts play, as the free-kick-taker passes the ball wherever the analogue is held. Harsher challenges, especially those requiring a booking, result in the traditional free kick scenario, meaning that the Mourinho tactic of hacking down counter-attacking opposition now holds genuine weight. Free kicks can occur regularly, not helped by the CPU's tendency to slide in on its own accord – a minor bug that proves one of *PES6*'s weaker points.**



Art imitating life. Italy is triumphant once again.

## MULTIFORMAT

**PS2 [£39.99]**

Visually, *Pro Evolution Soccer* on current-gen consoles has come as far as it can, so Seabass and co have concentrated on refining the game engine, with success. Slightly more stilted and robotic than the 360 version, *PES6* PS2 still plays a wonderful game of digital football.

Player likenesses vary from the sublime to the ridiculous. Cannavaro is ace.



Scholes has never been handsome, but here he looks bloody terrifying.

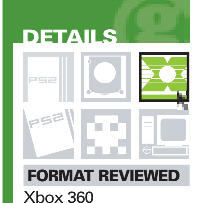


In control of the pitch, Rooney pulls off a trademark turn.

2K SPORTS HITS NOTHING BUT NET… AGAIN

# NBA 2K7

## DETAILS



**FORMAT REVIEWED**
Xbox 360

**OTHER FORMATS**
PlayStation2, Xbox (PS3 March)

**ORIGIN**
US

**PUBLISHER**
2K Sports

**DEVELOPER**
In-House

**PRICE**
£39.99

**RELEASE**
Out Now

**PLAYERS**
1-8

**Fast becoming the connoisseur's EA, 2K Sports has become synonymous with quality in recent years, helped no end by last season's excellent** *NBA 2K6*. By introducing the right-stick-to-shoot control system, stunning character models and unprecedented realism, it comfortably played EA's effort off the court, taking it straight to the hole and jamming it in its corporate face.

*2K7* however, displays the same lack of innovation that has cursed EA's output for years, relying on a few extraneous new modes and a casual glossing over of the core engine to warrant its release. Accusations of laziness are drowned out by the sound of squeaky trainers and swishing nets, and this remains the premier basketball sim: improved subtly yet significantly in a manner not too dissimilar to *PES*.

If your previous experience of basketball games starts and stops with *NBA Jam*, then *2K7* may come as something of a shock to the system. Every bit a simulation, it focuses on tight defence, quick ball rotation and percentage basketball, ie moving the ball around your team to allow for the easiest shot. That's not to say that flair is absent; just as *PES* contains all manner of stepovers, scissors kicks and 40-yard screamers, *2K7* lets you throw behind-the-back alley oops, hurl down 360 dunks and smash fearsome rejections into the stands… but only in moderation. The rarity of these 'magic moments' makes them all the more special – a notion that EA would do well to take note of.

On top of the now standard Season and Franchise modes (known as The Association), *2K7* introduces '24/7: Next', a rags-to-riches story, complete with dreadful cut-scenes, about a user-created street baller making his way up the ranks. Nothing too out of the ordinary you may think, but by forcing players to only ever control their created character, it impacts play dramatically. Certainly, defence becomes a completely different game, forcing you to constantly track and box out your man rather than relying on quick cursor changes. It's empowering, satisfying and different, simultaneously providing a solid grounding on basketball basics while amplifying the style, skill and attitude of street ball.

Is it enough though, to warrant a purchase should you own *2K7*'s predecessor? Probably not. However, with a superb replay feature that allows players to edit, manipulate and eventually upload their own highlight reels, unsurpassed visuals and an unparalleled level of realism, *NBA 2K7* is still the number one name in basketball.



**VERDICT 8/10**
STILL THE BEST BASKETBALL SIM MONEY CAN BUY

## MULTIFORMAT

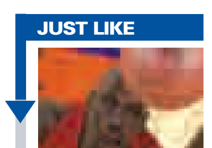
**PS2 [£29.99]**
Obviously, *NBA 2K7* takes a graphical hit on PS2, with inferior character models and animation, but its overall simulation of basketball is still superb. Tactics used in the next-gen version work identically here, so those favouring a strong post game will not be disappointed.

NBA 07



BETTER THAN

JUST LIKE



NBA 2K6



All manner of dunks and lay-ups are available to skilled players.

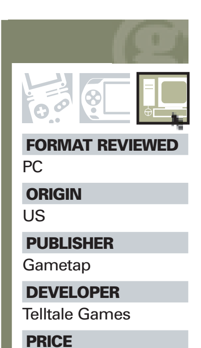





Shaq is still a monster on the court, and *2K7*'s post play allows him to perform to his full potential.

games™
**ENHANCED**
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL
**ENHANCED HUSTLE AND FLOW:** 24/7: Next is a fine addition to the series, focusing on the blossoming career of a single street baller, and placing you in control of him and him only.

# SAM & MAX EPISODE 1
## CULTURE SHOCK
### WHO SAYS THE ADVENTURE GENRE IS DEAD?



**FORMAT REVIEWED**
PC

**ORIGIN**
US

**PUBLISHER**
Gametap

**DEVELOPER**
Telltale Games

**PRICE**
$8.95

**RELEASE**
Out Now

**PLAYERS**
1

Like briefly catching up with an old friend after a 13-year absence, *Sam & Max Culture Shock* is an entirely pleasurable experience that leaves us wanting more, long before any feelings of tedium set in. It's been exactly that long since *Sam & Max Hit The Road* took up permanent residence on PC hard drives across the land and left us longing for another adventure with the funniest double act in gaming history. Though arguably superior adventures have emerged in the following years, none have had the charm, character or laugh-out-loud humour of Steve Purcell's comic creations.

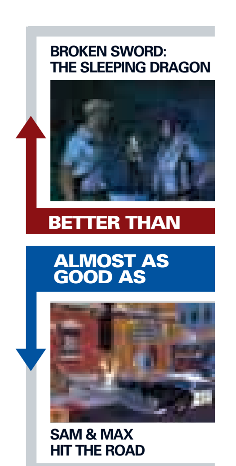
Now, the dog and rabbity thing have been rescued from the disinterested LucasArts for a series of short episodic adventures that capture the spirit of the 1993 classic. This first episode, lasting around two hours, sees the self-styled Freelance Police called to investigate a series of attacks by three former child stars of the Seventies. As the three man-children are dispatched, using typically wacky forms of justice, the plot thickens and Sam and Max find themselves in more trouble than they first expected. This isn't a lengthy narrative on the scale of the original game though. The pacing and plot are more akin to an episode of the animated series and the story is wrapped up fairly quickly so that the next episode can start afresh with a brand new case.

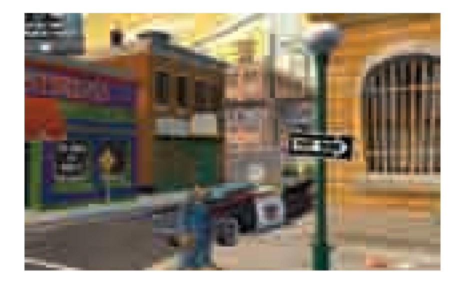
*Culture Shock*'s gameplay has undergone fewer changes than the narrative, as Telltale has wisely chosen to refine the mechanics rather than risk a potentially hazardous reinvention. Everything is controlled by context-sensitive mouse clicks with no keystrokes or icons to get in the way. Likewise, the inventory is now accessed beneath the action rather than disruptively cutting away to a second screen. The puzzles themselves can be just as fiendish as before, but now have much more logical solutions and, due to the game's smaller scale, the required item is never too far away so players will rarely find themselves desperately trying every item with every piece of scenery.

The only real criticism that can be made here is that it's not possible to combine items, meaning that players won't need to think too far ahead in order to solve a conundrum. New to the game however, are a series of conversational puzzles. Most comparable to *Monkey Island*'s insult swordfighting, it's a welcome addition that adds an essential layer of depth to the episode.

Most importantly, *Culture Shock* retains the snappy humour of its predecessor, ensuring that long-suffering fans of the detective duo will no doubt love the game as much as the original. Let's hope there's not another 13 years until *Episode 2* appears.

**VERDICT 8 /10**
A TRIUMPHANT RETURN



The 3D graphics stay true to the comic book origins.



Max is as pleasingly violent as he's ever been.

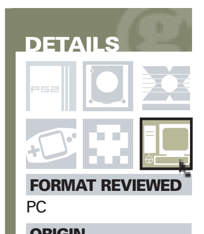



Driving sections are much more integral to the game this time.



With the detail turned up, the game does look quite pretty.

DETAILS



**FORMAT REVIEWED**
PC

**ORIGIN**
Sweden

**PUBLISHER**
Electronic Arts

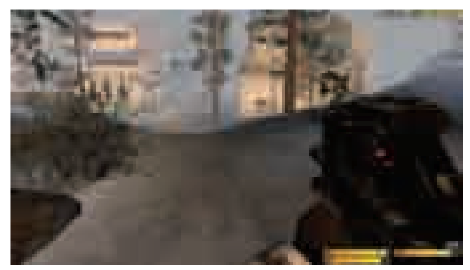
**DEVELOPER**
Digital Illusions CE

**PRICE**
£34.99

**RELEASE**
Out Now

**PLAYERS**
1-64 Online

**MINIMUM SPEC**
1.7GHz CPU, 512MB RAM, 128MB 3D card, 128kps Internet connection



The frame rate on the recommended gaming spec is not good.

BATTLING WITH MISPLACED OPTIMISM

# BATTLEFIELD 2142

**B*attlefield 2* was a game that breathed new life into the class-based online shooter.** Digital Illusions took the lessons it learnt from developing *Battlefield 1942* and *Battlefield Vietnam* and married it with new levels of graphical fidelity and tightly honed maps. The result was a beautiful, joyous frenzy of destructive mayhem that you could share with your friends. *Battlefield 2142* is a departure from the formula of the previous *Battlefield* games; rather than meticulously recreating weapons and vehicles from actual theatres of war, Digital Illusions has instead re-imagined its franchise as a futuristic sci-fi shooter. Drawing upon references as diverse as *MechWarrior*, *Deus Ex*, *Unreal Tournament* and *The Day After Tomorrow*, this is *Battlefield* as you've never seen it before. Unfortunately, if this game is anything to go by, it's also *Battlefield* as you'll never want to see it again.

Before getting into that however, let's discuss the actual game itself. *Battlefield* veterans will find that very few changes have been made to the core game from *Battlefield 2*. *Battlefield 2142* is very much *Battlefield 2* in techno-trousers, and while this window dressing is initially quite seductive, it quickly becomes apparent that this feels more like a total conversion mod than a new game in its own right. The backstory is that in an unexpected (read: utterly implausible) twist of fate, the global ice caps have spread over almost all of the habitable land in the world rather than melting due to global warming. That which remains must be fought over by two opposing coalitions of rag-tag nations: the EU and the Soviet-styled PAC. And they still, conveniently, have massive stockpiles of high-tech weapons to throw at each other.

You're not really going to mind that the story is utter bunkum though, as you're probably more interested in the wanton slaughter. We wouldn't care either, if it weren't for one problem: this glaciated vision of the future has a knock-on effect on the map design. The icy setting results in maps with a muted, bland colour palette and the snow and fog weather effects have a seriously detrimental effect on performance as



Here's what happens if you don't do a good enough job defending your Titan.

## KIT BAG

**When players are killed, their kit bags drop next to their bodies. While this might not be a new feature to the franchise, it does at least give you the opportunity to try out equipment and weapons the other player has unlocked that you may not have. So, not only does picking up kits prevent you from running out of ammo in the middle of a firefight, if you've been wondering whether unlocking the Recon equipment tree to give you the Lambert Carbine is worth it or not, simply spot an opposing player using one, kill them and try it out for yourself. That's what we call win-win.**



Prolong your life by hiding in a corner with a medi-pack to heal damage.



In the 22nd Century, all trees will be hideous, intangible wisps.

games™

## ENHANCED

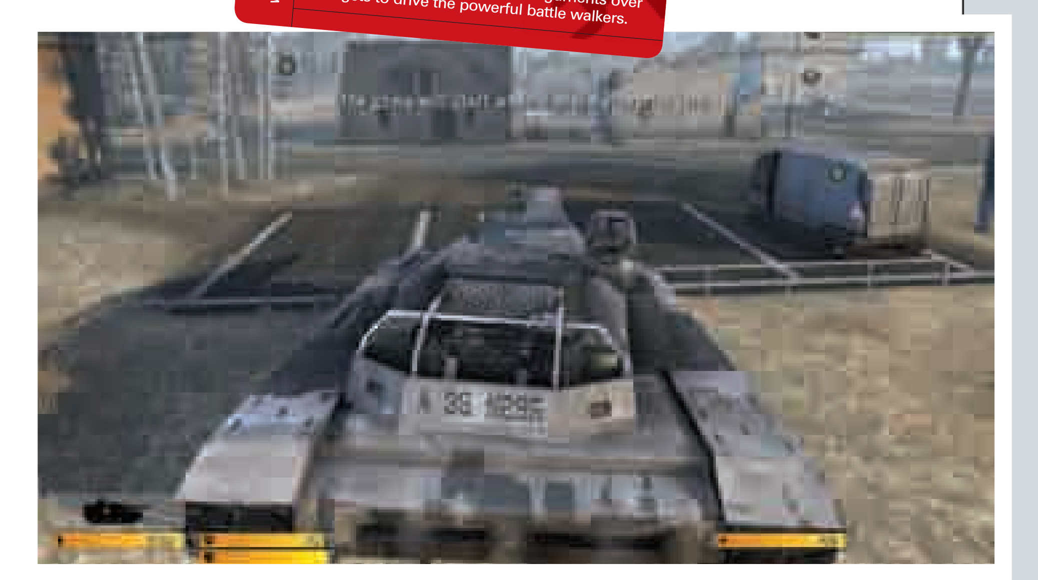
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

**TITANIC:** The new Titan game mode provides a welcome change of pace.

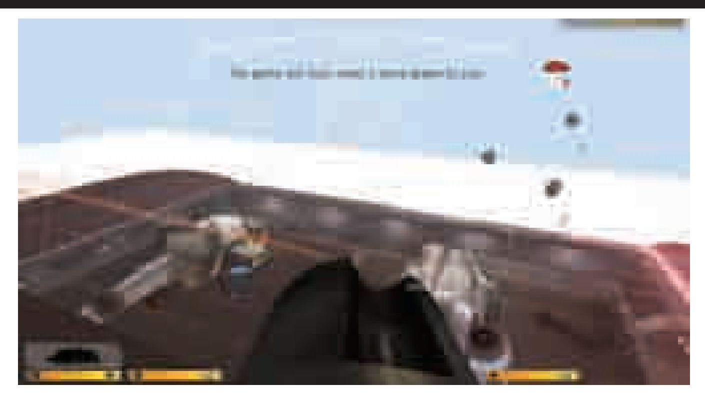
**TECHS-MECHS:** Expect fierce arguments over who gets to drive the powerful battle walkers.

well as distracting the player and making it harder to pick out enemies from the murk.

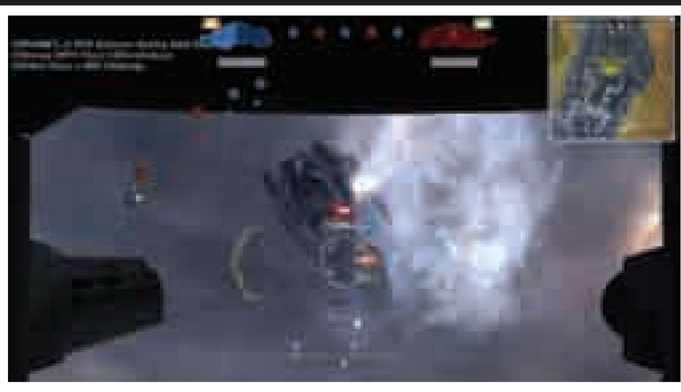
Game modes remain much the same as before – Conquest: Assault, Conquest: Head-to-head and so on – with the exception of the all-new Titan mode which will undoubtedly be *Battlefield 2142*'s biggest selling point. Architecturally, the maps are nicely designed, with plenty of natural choke points, and intelligent placement of cover, giving a nice ebb and flow to the action. The Titan maps are the largest, necessitating high levels of communication and co-operation by teams to execute co-ordinated attacks to seize missile silos. These silos replace the control points of the Conquest modes, and there are five silos on each Titan map. Every two minutes a cruise missile will launch from a controlled silo, targeting the opposing team's Titan – a colossal, airborne fortress. Once the missiles destroy a Titan's defensive shields, teams can directly assault its control room and reactor. The first team to destroy the opposing Titan wins. It may sound simple, but the effective use of vehicles is key, as lone



**"THIS IS BATTLEFIELD AS YOU'VE NEVER SEEN IT BEFORE. SADLY, IT'S ALSO BATTLEFIELD AS YOU'LL NEVER WANT TO SEE IT AGAIN"**



Titans have defensive guns you can use to successfully fend off airborne attacks.



Enemy Titans may be boarded using the jump pods in APCs.

infantrymen will struggle to make any tangible difference, except in the final stages of a match where the action takes place within the tight confines of the Titan's corridors.

The game's vehicles themselves – tanks, gunships, four-by-fours and airborne transport – are merely cosmetic re-workings of their *Battlefield 2* equivalents barring perhaps the PAC hovertank. The hovertank, unfortunately, is rather unwieldy to use though, thanks to a curious control set which requires you to use the mouse to steer, unlike the EU's conventional tank. The *BattleTech*-style walkers are *Battlefield 2142*'s jet fighters and are undoubtedly the pick of the vehicles, both in terms of looks and power, though before you get too excited, this brings us neatly on to the game's biggest problem.

Your first jaunt in a walker will probably end with you walking into a wall and then not being able to move. This is because *Battlefield 2142* suffers from the worst control lag **games™** has ever seen. Incredibly, it even manifests itself in the offline game. To add insult to injury, using the external camera doesn't help as this simply adds to the strain on system performance, and doesn't even render a targeting reticule that you can aim your weapons with. At points it was so bad that our keyboard buffers were shrieking in protest as the frame rate plummeted to that of your average PowerPoint presentation. And this was playing the game offline at 1,024x768 resolution with medium graphical settings on the recommended game specification.

At times, the game will simply take on a life of its own, with your avatar taking seconds to register a sprint command, or firing off magazine after magazine of ammunition despite the fact that you haven't touched the mouse for a good ten seconds. Given the performance issues we had on the recommended spec, the minimum specification quoted on the EA downloader – and here – is at worst nothing short of fanciful, and at best optimistic in the extreme. Unless you have 2GB of RAM and have bought a graphics card within the last 12 months, *Battlefield 2142* will give you a stark choice: you can either have a good-looking game, or you can have a playable frame rate where the game is aesthetically trumped by just about anything released in the last six years. For such a popular franchise, this level of performance optimisation is simply unacceptable.

There are other annoyances, too. The Engineer class' default rocket launcher is underpowered and desperately inaccurate at anything other than point-blank ranges; weapon reloading times are a fraction too long to

SOLDNER – SECRET WARS

BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

BATTLEFIELD 2

## FAQs

**Q. WHICH IS THE BEST CLASS?**
Assault is probably the most versatile, but Recon players will enjoy the Active Camouflage (cloaking device) unlock.

**Q. DOESN'T TITAN MODE SEEM FAMILIAR?**
Yes, it's essentially a reworking of *Unreal Tournament 2004*'s Onslaught game, so will probably be very popular.

**Q. ARE HELICOPTERS FLYABLE THIS TIME?**
They're a little easier to control than before, but expect to roll inexplicably into the countryside if you get lag.

## MISSING LINK

games™

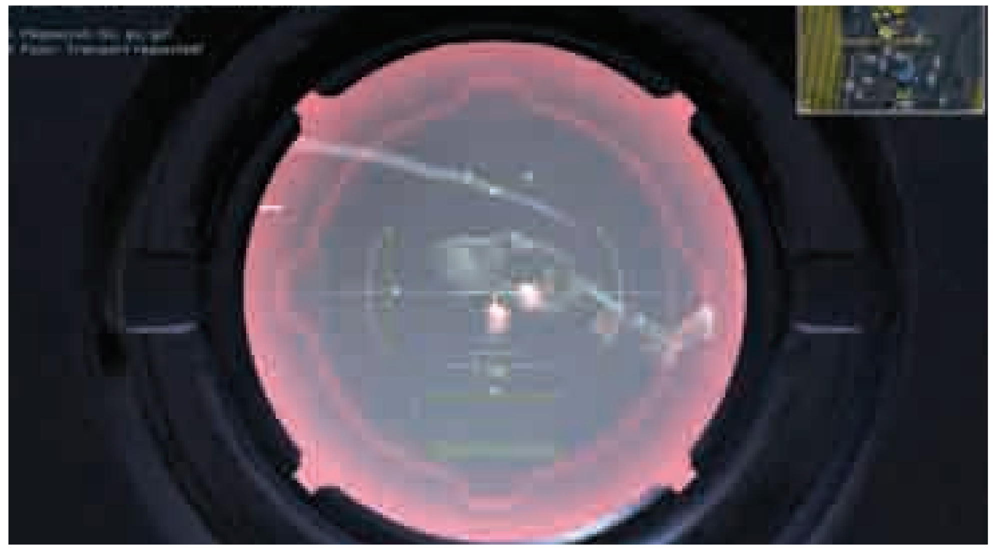
WHAT'S MISSING FROM THIS TITLE

**CONSISTENTLY INCONSISTENT:** You'd think a 50-ton tank that can blow holes in armoured battle mechs could destroy parked civilian vans. Or at least drive through a chain-link fence.

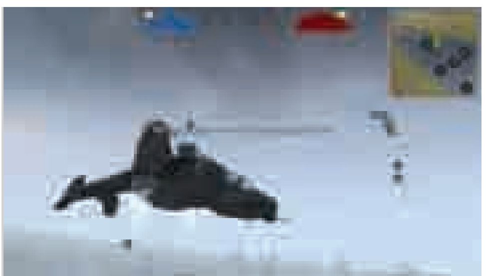


## HAVING EMP-ATHY

**As in its predecessor, the vehicles in *Battlefield 2142* are seriously overpowered and can dominate maps all too easily when used effectively. In an attempt to redress the balance, DICE has taken a leaf out of *Deus Ex*'s book and provided EMP (Electro-Magnetic Pulse) grenades as an unlockable piece of support equipment. These grenades are ideal for knocking out sensitive electronic equipment – this even applies to vehicles, which will be rendered immobile for a handful of seconds. This at least gives the lone infantryman a fighting chance to locate some cover and wait for a friendly walker to provide backup.**



The scoped viewpoint on all the weapons is very nicely detailed.



Tips for not crashing the gunships: keep lots of altitude and go easy on the controls.

give you a fighting chance at close range; the collision detection for knife attacks is flaky and you're never too sure how close you need to be in order to get a hit; and several of the unlocks are of dubious value, the ballistic shield can be taken out with a single well-aimed sniper shot, for example. Perhaps most damning is the fact that the game doesn't really do anything to improve upon its predecessors. Why stick to the same old soldier classes? Where's the environmental damage or the ability to destroy cover? And why can't tanks drive through three-foot tall brick walls?

To give credit where credit is due, there are a few nice touches. If your PC can handle them, the textures are wonderfully detailed, especially for the weapons, and the reloading animations are beautiful. The Squad Leader drones are a useful addition, particularly the armed version, and the sentry guns are handy for plugging up choke points or laying ambushes. Most impressive though, is the graphical effect to your vision when you get hit with an EMP grenade: your view dissolves into multi-coloured static which spasms and writhes with electronic agony. It's a lovely bit of detail, but even here it's little more than a flash-bang effect from *Battlefield 2* given the Trinny and Susannah treatment.

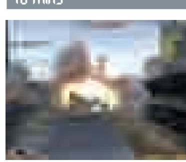
So, while not a game completely devoid of ideas, *Battlefield 2142* nevertheless fails to offer anything genuinely fresh. The new elements added to the franchise are shamelessly plundered from other games, and generally not as well executed. When you add this to the execrable standard of game performance and Digital Illusions' questionable record of releasing patches that actually remedy technical issues, *Battlefield 2142* is hard to recommend.

## VERDICT 5/10
**HORRENDOUS TECHNICAL ISSUES MAR A SOLID GAME**

**"IF YOUR PC CAN HANDLE THEM, THE TEXTURES ARE WONDERFULLY DETAILED AND THE RELOADING ANIMATIONS ARE BEAUTIFUL"**

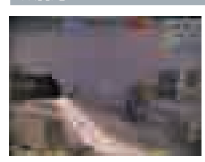
### TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS
**THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM**

10 MINS



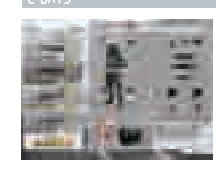
After getting to grips with the controls and tweaking the graphical settings, you'll jump into the nearest mech. Gosh. It's just like *MechWarrior*, isn't it? The first one…

4 HOURS

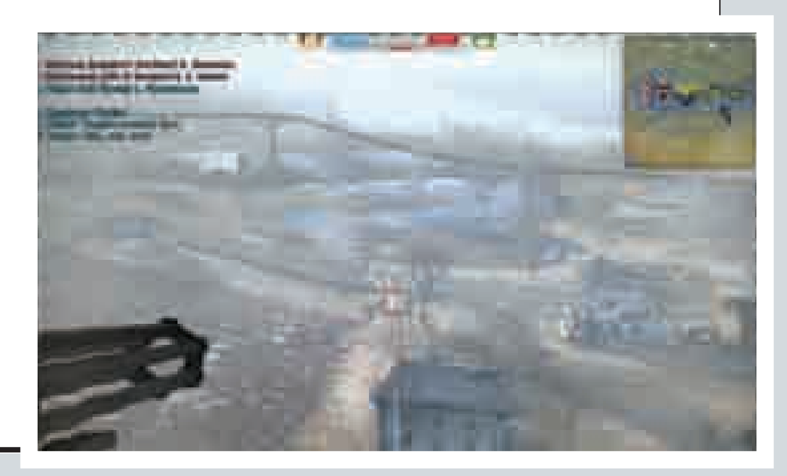


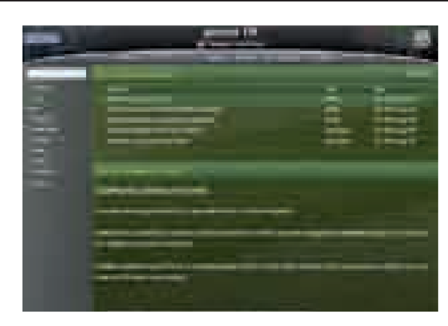
You'll be playing exclusively online, thankful that at least sometimes your team-mates respond with something other than "Not happening" to a pick-up request.

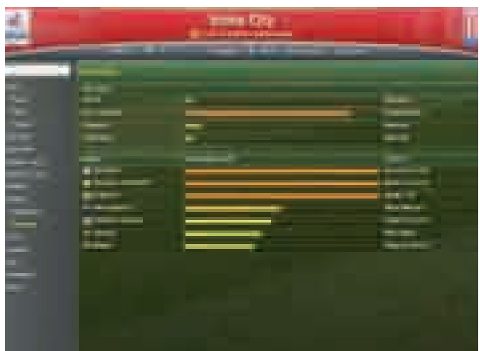
2 DAYS



By now you should be unlocking some of the more useful equipment, weapons and player abilities. Choose carefully, as unlocking all 40 upgrades will take a very long time.









Your scouting expertise, viewed in chart form. We know everything there is to know about England, we do.

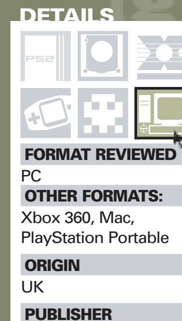



You'll soon be dragged into all sorts of embarrassing playground antics by increased media interrogation. Keep your friends close…

# FOOTBALL MANAGER 2007

## ISN'T IT? WASN'T IT? MARVELLOUS

**DETAILS**



**FORMAT REVIEWED**
PC

**OTHER FORMATS:**
Xbox 360, Mac, PlayStation Portable

**ORIGIN**
UK

**PUBLISHER**
Sega

**DEVELOPER**
Sports Interactive

**PRICE**
£34.99

**RELEASE**
Out Now

**PLAYERS**
Massively multi-player

**MINIMUM SPEC**
800Mhz Pentium 3, 128MB RAM, 1024x768 display, DirectX 8.1 compatible sound card, 650MB hard drive space

**With each subsequent *Football Manager* release comes the same old scenario: there you sit, totally immersed in wheeling and/or dealing, when some wag peers over your shoulder and voices its similarity to a spreadsheet before smugly walking away like they invented the joke.** While such insolence might provoke Gandhi to sharpen the edge of his keyboard broodingly, more sensible gamers should be satisfied to replace that emotion with pity, due to SI's focus on blissful surface simplicity. Indeed, the only significant negatives to tarnish the enjoyment garnered from the series in recent years have come through the team's determination to replicate developments in real life to the letter; more tight-fisted clubs and a restrictive transfer window most prevalent amongst the downers.

Take the still-controversial abstract match engine, for example. Where other sims have introduced the third dimension, the change has simply led to so many more AI and animation-based minutiae that can (and do) destroy the illusion almost as soon as it's begun. A *Football Manager* dot moving but three inches across the screen, by way of comparison, consistently generates images of jinking wunderkinds handing defenders' dignity to them on a plate as the stands rock with anticipation, always free of the irksome limitations of modern computing because a large part of the action takes place in your own head. It remains genius, and the best possible AI solution until technology allows us to print out Premiership footballers.

The new additions trotted out to justify the £35 price tag focus mainly on righting the aforementioned long-standing imbalances. Deals can be thrashed out at boardroom level, providing the option to become a feeder or parent club in return for guaranteed friendlies, the acceptance of loan players or cold hard cash. While this provides much-needed extra income, the ability to quiz any of your players for potential signings they're aware of offers a few unearthed gems to spend your hard-earned on. Add this to the reworked talent-spotting system, which attaches levels of expertise per region to individual scouts, and the problem is almost totally neutralised. In the interest of balance, the fact that unknown players must now be scouted multiple times before you'll gain access to all of their stats can be a nuisance, as the game's at its best when it doesn't pretend to be anything other than an elaborate card-trading exercise, but such concerns won't be foremost in your mind when you look up and it's four in the morning. Again.

**VERDICT 8/10**
QUITE SIMPLY, THERE'S NO ALTERNATIVE.

**MULTIFORMAT**

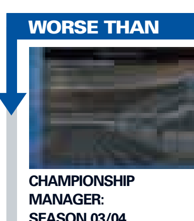
**PLAYSTATION PORTABLE [£34.99]**
The option to manage international sides, a full database editor and the removal of a dearth of cheap players make the wonderfully stripped-down simplicity of the PSP outing a genuine option, never mind an alternative. Perfect pick-up-and-play handheld fare, which, frankly, we should be seeing more of.

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2006

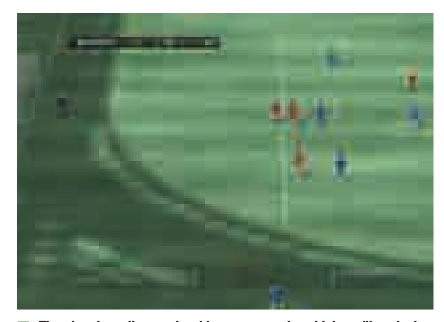


BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER: SEASON 03/04



There's only really one playable camera angle, which you'll no doubt change to immediately. Willy Sagnol dancing is an optional extra.



Players remain as sweaty and horrific as ever, more so as a still. Slowly, the nights are getting longer.



The stadium roster has approximately halved, but there's always hundreds of eager flag-wavers, the Emirates and New Wembley to look out for.

# FIFA 07

## FEELING SHORT-CHANGED? BLAME (EA) CANADA

### MISSING LINK

WHAT'S MISSING FROM THIS TITLE

**IMPERIALISM:** Why make Martin Tyler utter such filth as 'go-ahead goal'? The US won't buy it, anyway.
**MORE TEAMS:** If you like the Mexican league you're in luck though. Go Pumas.

### DETAILS



**FORMAT REVIEWED**
Xbox 360
**OTHER FORMATS**
PlayStation2, Xbox, GameCube, Game Boy Advance, Nintendo DS, PC, PlayStation Portable
**ORIGIN**
Canada
**PUBLISHER**
Electronic Arts
**DEVELOPER**
In-House
**PRICE**
£49.99
**RELEASE**
Out Now
**PLAYERS**
1-2

**Appearances can be quite deceiving. Seconds after ripping the disc from its satisfying plastic film, you'll be putting up the umbrella in readiness for another EA shower of insignificant change.** Certainly, between the Community Shield final being held at Stamford Bridge while a virtual Millennium Stadium lies empty, the presence of only six domestic leagues and a god-awful menu system surely only provided as a distraction, the opening few minutes of play alone suggest this is just another checkpoint-ticking release. For the first time in years though, things start to improve once you take the field.

It's instantly apparent that the football itself feels more like a separate physical object than living *FIFA* memory can recollect, not only in terms of the cosmetic, slightly uncertain line it takes across the turf, but through the odd atmosphere-enhancing dodgy ricochet and the way it can be gracefully stroked between players. Indeed, it's not an exaggeration to say that the box-to-box passing and movement comes within a whisker of Konami's fluid benchmark. Also improved – though again, obviously aping its main competitor – is a much-improved feeling of weight to the players themselves, so much so that it's eminently possible to smoothly nudge opponents off the ball if your angle of approach is skilful enough. Similarly, one-on-one defensive situations become just a little less hectic when you ignore the ball completely and simply guide a striker in the required direction using your own body strength. The trade-off for such shenanigans is a slightly less effective conservative tackle, a quite welcome amendment.

While the freshness of it all will continue to entertain for a week or two, the whole experience is akin to filling up cracks in a wall using Angel Delight: eventually, something's going to pong. The 'finesse' shots that lent all the grace of Martin Keown to the recent PS2 outing continue to provide cover for what would be a terrible finishing system without it. Put simply, goals become practically a sure thing with the right bumper held down, and near impossible without. Secondly, the same old AI issues persist – clean through strikers meandering performing mazy dribbles, incrementally suspicious 'miraculous saves', that kind of thing. The 'playing in treacle' syndrome refuses to budge, too. While it'd be wrong to criticise EA for encouraging a passing game, abhorrent 'trick stick' dribbling assistance is far too jerky to be of any use, making all too many games a pretty, but nevertheless staid, midfield slog. Damn that first line to hell, then.

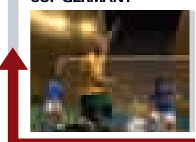


**VERDICT 5/10**
BETTER, BUT IT'S STILL NOT ENOUGH

### MULTIFORMAT

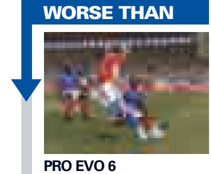
**PLAYSTATION2 [£39.99]**
While this – along with all other current-gen conversions – boasts the enviable wealth of leagues and competitions that have become second nature, 360 owners must make do with half a dozen top flights and no way to create custom tournaments beyond the default exhibition and season modes. And no, that's not the wrong way around.

**2006 FIFA WORLD CUP GERMANY**



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

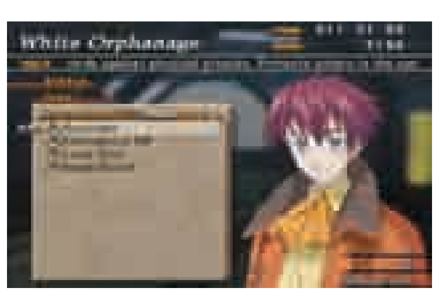


**PRO EVO 6**




The hex-based combat grid is small but surprisingly strategic, especially when using the outside tiles.

No one wanted to play frisbee with Raquel.




Oliver Twist's older brother doesn't need to beg for food.

# WILD ARMS 4

## NOW WITH 85 PER CENT LESS COWBOYS



**DETAILS**

**FORMAT REVIEWED**
PlayStation2

**ORIGIN**
Japan

**PUBLISHER**
505 Game Street

**DEVELOPER**
Media Vision

**PRICE**
£29.99

**RELEASE**
Out Now

**PLAYERS**
1

**It can be frustrating to see a series change tack when everyone but the developer realises that it was onto a good thing.** *Warrior Within's* focus on combat and forced 'darkness' only ever detracted from *Sands Of Time's* sublime evolution of the traditional *Prince Of Persia* formula, for example, while *Rainbow Six 3's* heart-in-mouth tension was somehow turned into a *Team America*-esque free-for-all for *Lockdown*. Here, though, it's a matter of location. With the majority of RPGs falling under either 'fantasy' or 'futuristic' headings, the rustic charm of the *Wild ARMs* series has always worked in its favour and given the series a sense of purpose and identity. Best get rid of that then. Sigh.

Moving away from its Western-inspired heritage, *Wild ARMs 4* instead takes place in a war-ravaged world more akin to the likes of the *Fallout* series. But this is just the start of the shake-up; the handling of the narrative, grid-based combat and painfully linear progression have also changed drastically since their counterparts in *Wild ARMs 3*. The most grating of these is the storytelling and dialogue. While the pacing is strong and fluid, characters often just end up waxing lyrical about or around their particular stereotype – Jude is the dangerously impulsive hero, Arnaud is the self-obsessed 'genius', Yulie the loveable, mistreated little girl and Raquel is the token wandering sword master – or launching into another sickening diatribe about the differences between kids and adults. Even more baffling is why the group is together in the first place, not to mention where they're going as not even they seem to know half the time, making much of the progression rather frivolous. Themes of evolution, morality and existentialism become increasingly prevalent as the tale drags on, never really touching on any one area enough to pique interest before returning to the posse, 'anything is possible if you put your mind to it' mentality.

Fans of exploration will most likely want to sit this one out as well. With locations selected from a simple points-and-lines world map, this was never going to be an epic quest and even within the locales themselves, freedom is hardly dish of the day. The Tools concept used in previous games has been dumbed down to disastrous effect to create 'puzzles' of sorts – pick up a sword to whack a switch or grab a bomb to break through some rubble. If you see an object lying around, you know you'll need to use it to either progress or snatch some nearby treasure. Slightly more interesting are the combination of Jude's Accelerator ability and the side-scrolling platform sections of the game. The former allows time to be slowed down and reveals hidden goodies, as well as letting you avoid random

**FAQs**

**Q. HOW LONG IS IT?**
At a little over 20 hours, *Wild ARMs 4* will surely rate as one of the shortest RPGs out there.

**Q. GOOD CHARACTERS?** Not particularly. Everything feels by-numbers and most characters aren't developed fully enough.

**Q. THE FIGHTING?**
Yes. Indeed, it's almost worth playing the game for, just to see that there are fresh ideas out there.



SUIKODEN 4
BETTER THAN
WORSE THAN
SHADOW HEARTS: COVENANT

XP bonuses can seriously affect levelling up.

This is not the time nor the place. Surely you could have found somewhere more private.

encounters. But its primary use is in puzzle-solving elements, using the benefits of extra time to hit several switches in quick succession, for example. As for the platform sections, they do break up the dungeon crawl somewhat, but don't expect them to test your reactions much.

The one interesting and original idea that *Wild ARMs 4* has going for it is its hex-based combat. Get into a fight and the action will be split up into seven hexagons, across which your allies and enemies will be placed at random. Attacking a space targets any enemies standing there while moving to an adjacent hex also forfeits a turn. In addition, most status ailments or buffs are targeted on a hex rather than a character, an interesting concept that would probably work better on a larger-scale grid system. But the real strategy comes into play when you start trying to use (or stop opponents from using) the three elemental tiles around the outside. Certain attacks such as Yulie's revoltingly powerful Material summons are powered up by these while Arnaud's Jump ability lets him move quickly to any other hex, taking all other allies on the same space with him. Working combos around these moves is a no-brainer, but once Raquel joins your party, tactics will start to go out the window as you rely upon and abuse the insane combat abilities of *Wild ARMs 4*'s most broken character.

Competition in the RPG sector is fierce, and this fourth instalment in the celebrated *Wild ARMs* series smacks of a developer running out of ammo while rivals like SquareEnix go from strength to strength around it. The jump from Western-style settings and simplistic themes to sterilised labs in a war-torn land and artificial evolution is a pretty hefty one. There can be little doubt that a lot was lost en route. Still, the minimal random encounters and unique battle system make this a great little stopgap while you wait for your US copy of *Final Fantasy XII* to arrive in the post, but that's all Media Vision's effort can ever really be seen as – a passable distraction amid higher-profile titles rather than a direct competitor to the smoking guns of the genre.

**games™ FUSED**

**BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER**

**WAY OUT EAST:** It's fair to say that much of the game follows the traditional JRPG template.
**THINK TWICE:** But combat owes more to strategic RPGs such as *FF Tactics* and *Disgaea*.

**VERDICT 6/10**

**BOG-STANDARD FARE SAVED BY ORIGINAL COMBAT**

## RANDOM SCHMANDOM

**With the gaming world so hateful towards the RPG staple that is random battles, *Wild ARMs 4* will be a breath of fresh air. The encounter rate to begin with is surprisingly low, opting to provide the player with an equip item early on, making battles more frequent should they wish to use it rather than piling on the enemies. But by using the Accelerator ability, you'll have more hassle-free travel while the effect is active. Already, *Wild ARMs 4* is full of good news for those who wish harm upon the creator of the random encounter but it gets better – reach and purify a special save point in each area and you can turn encounters off. Take on a few enemies from time to time, or else get punished by the bosses.**



The name of the game: customising your ARMs is key to character development.



Stop playing King of the Castle. Get down from there and come home for dinner.

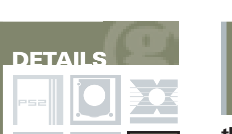
THE BEST EMAILS YOU'LL EVER RECEIVE

# NAKED WAR



**CARE IN THE COMMUNITY:** Each player is in one of two teams – red or blue – that can receive free credits at the end of each month if their members have amassed the most victories.

**DETAILS**



**FORMAT REVIEWED**
PC

**ORIGIN**
UK

**PUBLISHER**
Zee-3

**DEVELOPER**
The Pickford Brothers

**PRICE**
$19.99 for 20 Credits

**RELEASE**
Out Now

**PLAYERS**
2

**MINIMUM SPEC:**
1GHz processor, 64MB RAM, 32MB graphics, 40MB HDD space, Internet connection

**When the Pickford Brothers walked out of the videogame rat race to become an independent development crime-fighting duo, they took a massive risk.** But now it seems that gamble has paid off… in a big way. The brothers have undoubtedly made the game of their careers.

It may look like a generic strategy type, but underneath *Naked War*'s Nintendo-style visuals and simplified controls lies the beating heart of an expertly crafted war game. Its basic premise sits somewhere between the two-player modes of *Advance Wars* and *Worms*, with each player commanding four soldiers, with only pistols and a handful of vehicles at their disposal. And the twist? No soldiers can die. Instead, they are demobbed (and de-clothed – hence *Naked War*) while their 'doofer' – a floating star-like medal – is transferred to the soldier that did them in. The ingenious part is that a battle is not won until a team has captured all of these doofers, meaning that it is possible for a losing player to claw their way back by re-capturing their lost doofers from the enemy.

Doing so can often feel like a week in advanced army training, as playing *Naked War* requires much more strategic thinking than you would at first expect. The Pickfords have fine-tuned the gameplay to within an inch of its life, so every single part of the game, be it a vehicle, a tree or anything else, has a perfectly balanced set of strengths and weaknesses. The best players will quickly learn the pros and cons of each element to exploit them like a master chess player, while beginners will eventually get to grips with the complex set of rules by learning from their own mistakes, their brains reshaping as the sheer depth of the game dawns on them.

*Naked War*'s unusual approach to content delivery is not to be underestimated. In a radical departure from the majority of online games, the innovative system does not require each player to sit at their PCs at the same time, as each turn is delivered to the other player by email then picked up and played at their convenience. The resulting experience is one that feels much more relaxing, as *Naked War* bends over to accommodate itself into the player's life. For those who do spend the majority of their time in front of a PC screen, the upside of the email system is that they may have several games running at once so that they're never short of a turn to play. It's a considered approach that makes the outstanding strategy in *Naked War* one of the most refreshing and damn near-essential games of the year, and an inspirational figurehead for independent developers everywhere.

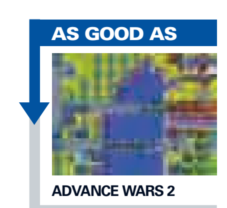
**VERDICT 9/10**
ADDICTIVE GAMING, BRILLIANTLY DELIVERED

REBELSTAR: TACTICAL COMMAND

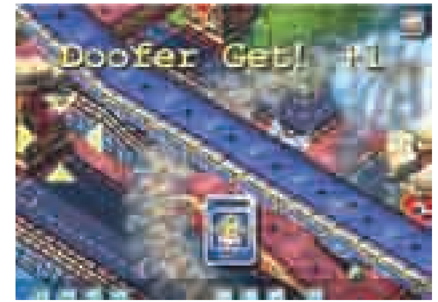


BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS



ADVANCE WARS 2




Download and play *Naked War* at www.zee-3.com.

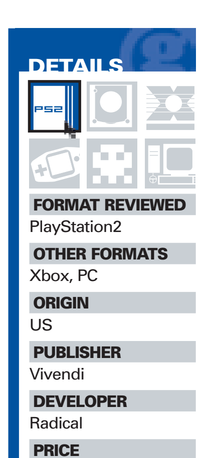



A single turn can be quite complicated… if you can handle it.

IF THIS IS THE WORLD, YOU CAN KEEP IT

# SCARFACE: THE WORLD IS YOURS




**FORMAT REVIEWED**
PlayStation2

**OTHER FORMATS**
Xbox, PC

**ORIGIN**
US

**PUBLISHER**
Vivendi

**DEVELOPER**
Radical

**PRICE**
£39.99

**RELEASE**
Out Now

**PLAYERS**
1

**Somebody stop the sandbox train, we want to get off**. Don't mistake our intentions, the advent of the open world filled us with excitement too, but the deluge of titles trying to hang a theme on the *GTA* template has become tiresome. Recent next-gen games *Just Cause* and *Saints Row* have at least shown that innovation, however minor, is still possible, but the vast majority seem to be doing the bare minimum to justify the label and sell a few more copies. *Scarface* is a case in point.

The name alone guarantees a fan base, and many will be excited by the concept of Tony surviving the film's climactic gunfight and snorting his way back to the top – though we aren't among them. Sure, the play area is large, but your freedom is restricted at every turn. There's no button to open doors, so those that are closed stay closed – which is the majority, even in your own mansion. The streets are lifeless, the choice of vehicles is limited to a few cars, hell, Tony even lacks the ability to jump. We have to assume that this is because the game was designed at ground level and there simply isn't anywhere to go.

Even the slight choices you are allowed to make are hampered by several ill-advised gameplay elements. Criminality obviously attracts police attention, but in *Scarface* it isn't simply a matter of shaking your pursuers, there's also a time limit – take too long and the message "You're Fucked" appears, rendering escape impossible. Without one of the faster cars this is a frustratingly common occurrence, and rather than a simple fine, you lose every penny you haven't laundered through a bank. Cash is king in *Scarface*, and the constant need to visit the bank for fear of losing it all saps fun from everything.

In place of the depth afforded by other sandbox games are discomforting quantities of gratuitous violence, taking the oft-maligned drive/shoot mission mechanic to new heights of repetition. Brian De Palma's film was an indictment of violence and capitalist greed; here they are your primary goal – the developer is relishing in the brutality and profanity and severely missing the point in the process. Of course, the film's huge hip-hop following (itself obsessed with inflated notions of wealth, power and respect) indicates that the large majority of its fans miss the point too. *Scarface* covers the basics competently enough to turn the diehards on, but with *Vice City* going for a song and *Vice City Stories* on its way there is little to recommend to the impartial gamer.

**VERDICT 4/10**
SANDBOX BY NUMBERS IN A LURID SHIRT

TRUE CRIME: NEW YORK CITY



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY



Tony has three main outfits. You aren't able to customise your appearance as in other sandbox games.



Countering an enemy blow or attacking up close can trigger a messy execution attack.



Tony isn't voiced by Al Pacino and the effect is slightly less than convincing. Not much, mind.

# GOTHIC 3

## HERE'S AN IDEA: LET'S MAKE A GREAT GAME AND NOT FINISH IT

**DETAILS**



**FORMAT REVIEWED**
PC

**ORIGIN**
Germany

**PUBLISHER**
JoWooD

**DEVELOPER**
Piranha Bytes

**PRICE**
£34.99

**RELEASE**
Out Now

**PLAYERS**
1

**MINIMUM SPEC**
Pentium 4/AMD Athlon 2.0GHz, 512MB RAM, DX9 compatible 128MB GFX Card, 16-bit sound card

**What's more frustrating than a highly anticipated sequel that materialises as a half-baked, slipshod, unfinished and, need we say, disappointing waste of money?** Frankly, the answer is Piranha Bytes' *Gothic 3* – a sequel with all the latter attributes, but with an equal measure of brilliance and real satisfaction for every horrible development glitch that plagues its high-scoring potential.

In these post-*Oblivion* times, any sandbox fantasy RPG will cower in the shadow of Bethesda's behemoth. To compare *Gothic 3* to a game like that though, would be to do it an injustice. The *Gothic* series has been around for five years now and the only features its third instalment really share with *Oblivion* are its immense scale and open-world gaming ethos. Unlike *Oblivion*, the majority of the hundreds of main and side-quests available directly impact the ultimate outcome of the game, as they usually involve aiding either of *Gothic 3*'s two warring factions: the orcs or the humans.

The character development system is also far from derivative of the *Elder Scrolls* games. It hails from RPG days of yore when killing a beastie yielded experience points and eventually a level-up. As *Gothic 3*'s hero is born a wandering jack-of-all-trades, there's no class system and thus no need for the skill-rather-than-kill-focused levelling that *The Elder Scrolls* introduced to role-playing. In fact, after hundreds of hours in the wonderful world of Cyrodil, *Gothic 3* is a refreshing return to a more satisfying style of play where battling high-level bad-asses is made that much more exciting by the promise of reaping a large experience point boost. It's almost as rewarding as seeking underhand methods of defeating an overwhelmingly powerful foe by exploiting minor flaws in the gameplay – it isn't cheating when it's taken you ten minutes of patient attrition to kill a troll that's supposed to swat you dead in one blow.

And here's another bombshell for *Elder Scrolls* fanatics: *Gothic 3* is also visually more evocative than *Oblivion*. Quite a feat, considering it's not half as realistic or technically accomplished as Emergent's Gamebryo engine. Whereas *Oblivion* knocked you clean off your feet by painting the kind of vista that Constable would be proud of, *Gothic 3* has a far subtler and, dare we say, more effective approach. It features the same deep draw distances, but landscapes begin to blur as they reach the horizon, and as the fine detail is lost in the haze, major points of interest such as villages and natural structures are highlighted in the background. Couple this fogging effect with the use of a distinctly gaudy palette – entirely appropriate to the fantasy theme – and *Gothic 3* begins to draw you into its realm. From the outset,

**FAQs**

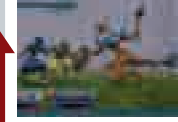
**Q. MANY DIFFERENT CREATURES?**
Over 50 monsters plus humanoid enemies are scattered throughout the land.

**Q. IS COMBAT EQUALLY CRAP FOR ALL?**
In a word – yes. And encountering groups of enemies is even more frustrating.

**Q. CAN I USE THE 'CRAPNESS' TO MY ADVANTAGE?**
Yes, if you confront an uphill foe. But that doesn't balance the game or make it satisfying in any way.

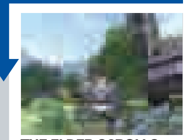


**BLADE DANCER: LINEAGE OF LIGHT**



**BETTER THAN**

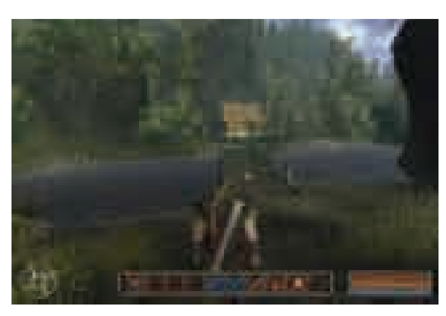
**WORSE THAN**



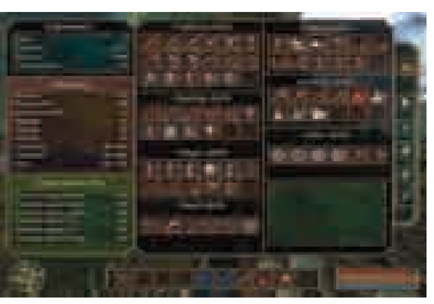
**THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION**



Don't tell us you're not just a teensy bit curious about what lies beyond the horizon.



It may appear to be just a river, but any second now it will no doubt start flowing uphill.



One of *Gothic 3*'s strongest features is its rewarding character development and intricate skill system.

An innovative use of fogging and visuals and not a Gamebryo engine in sight.

the beckoning countryside and eye-catching visuals encourage exploration and adventure as curiosity inevitably leads you into trouble.

It sounds compelling in theory, but in Piranha Bytes' deluded grandeur it committed a cardinal gaming sin and released a review build so shockingly incomplete that you'd think you were playing an early beta. *Gothic 3* is a tissue of bugs and flawed gameplay elements, the least infuriating of which are graphical: dying frequently sends your character through the scenery to give you an inverted world view, water completely disobeys the laws of physics, and it's not uncommon for you and any bipedal enemy to ditch walking in favour of skating.

We could harp on about the poor character animation, the bizarre concept of 'lives' and the strange notion of chivalry, even among dinosaurs and trolls, who refuse to attack when you're knocked down, but these are only very minor concerns. Combat is by far the biggest upset, and considering it forms a central part of *Gothic 3*'s gameplay, its numerous flaws will soon begin to impinge on your gaming pleasure.

JoWooD has pitched fighting in *Gothic 3* as a 'specially designed easy combat system' and there's no ambiguity in that statement at all. Simply unsheathe your weapon of choice, push your man in the desired direction and repeatedly tap the left mouse button. In theory this is quite an acceptable approach for a purist RPG: relying on random rolls of the dice and weapon/character stats rather than the skill of the player to determine the outcome of battle. Unfortunately, Piranha Bytes' misguided attempt to lay an *Oblivion*-style combat system over an already flawed interface has resulted in the catastrophic disruption of the entire game. Its simple reliance on timing a parry, dodge or counter strike just falls flat on its face when combat takes place on any gradient other than a completely flat plain. It's nigh on impossible to fight when faced with a downhill opponent who suddenly acquires a cobra-like ability to strike multiple times, interrupting any potential manoeuvre, and transforming an otherwise weedy opponent, such as the common wolf, into an incredibly frustrating threat.

games™

## MISSING LINK

**WHAT'S MISSING FROM THIS TITLE**

**COMBAT:** Piranha should have either torn this hideous aberration out of *Gothic 3* and started again, or spent time ironing out the creases in the simple concepts that should have worked.

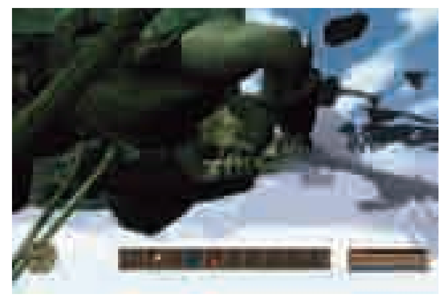
Within a few days of receiving the *Gothic 3* review code, we discovered, via its website, that Piranha Bytes had scrapped that particular build, apparently due to "problems" and was busy making another gold master (the final version of a piece of software which is sent to the manufacturer for distribution). It's a real shame that a game with such promise has to be scored so low because of inefficiencies within the industry, especially if the version that's on retailers' shelves is now far tighter than the copy in our possession. Nevertheless, the promise of bugs being 'ironed out' before a retail release is a story we've heard all too many times before, and it rarely bears any fruit. Simply put, the current 'review' copy of *Gothic 3* has the potential to be an eight, but as it is, it's an eight gone horribly, horribly wrong.

**VERDICT 4/10**

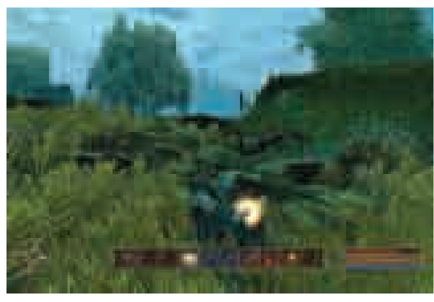
**DOES A CRIMINAL INJUSTICE TO A GREAT RPG**

## THE PROFIT MOTIVE

**Gold is a very tangible part of *Gothic 3*. Unlike *Oblivion*'s devaluation of its own currency, the emphasis here on having a fat wad of cash becomes apparent early on. You can sell anything that has a value attached to it with the mandatory trader markdown but without *Oblivion*'s price cap. Decent items are expensive, so trading goods is important, which makes acquiring valuable artefacts important, which makes the killing of powerful foes to loot their coveted treasure hordes important too. Essentially, it's a classically compelling RPG formula that rewards risks especially as, given the chance, most humanoids will loot your body and steal your weapon.**



Death puts a brand new perspective on the world of *Gothic 3*.



This beastie has obviously been skipping its monster etiquette classes.







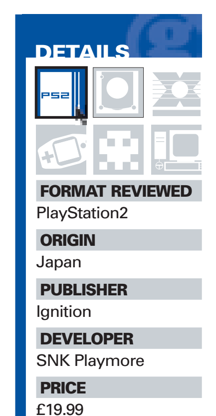
New girl Ai fights with *Tetris* blocks and her 'joy joy balloon'. Primarily a zoning character, she's very hard to use…




Tung Fu Rue, like many other characters here, is easy to get to grips with – perfect for beginners.

# NEO GEO BATTLE COLISEUM

## LET THE BATTLE COMMENCE…




**FORMAT REVIEWED**
PlayStation2

**ORIGIN**
Japan

**PUBLISHER**
Ignition

**DEVELOPER**
SNK Playmore

**PRICE**
£19.99

**RELEASE**
Out Now

**PLAYERS**
1-2

**Now Capcom has seemingly left the beat-'em-up genre forever to pursue its dreams of undead shopping malls and lost planets, the likes of Sammy and SNK Playmore are left to carry the mantle.** While the *Guilty Gear* and *King Of Fighters* series continue to carve their own niche out of the ever-shrinking market, *Neo Geo Battle Coliseum* is essentially SNK Playmore's own version of… well, the *Capcom Vs SNK* series.

As the title suggests, it pits characters throughout *Neo Geo's* history against each other, and name checking them is half the fun. There are characters from *King Of Fighters* (K', Iori), *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves* (Hotaru, Rock), *Last Blade* (Akari, Washizuka), *Samurai Shodown* (Nakoruru, Haohmaru), *Fatal Fury* (Geese, Chonshu) plus cameos from other Neo Geo oddities such as *Athena* and *King Of Monsters*. There's even time for Marco and Mars People from *Metal Slug* to put an appearance in. Three new characters bring the roster up to an impressive total of 40 faces. It goes without saying that the size of the cast and variety is the main strength of *Neo Geo Battle Coliseum*, and that most of the cast are balanced is testament to the skilled hand of SNK.

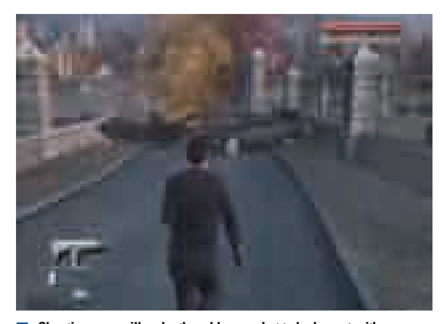
The gameplay itself takes the form of two-on-two tag-team action, with your partner on standby to be tagged in at any time. Unsurprisingly, the brawling itself doesn't fall all that far from the *King Of Fighters* tree, playing close homage to *KOF XI* in this instance. The combo system isn't quite as tight, but it's been made more accessible, while characters keep certain elements from their original outings to separate themselves from each other – *Last Blade* characters can still parry attacks, for example.

*Neo Geo Battle Coliseum* is good fun, but doesn't quite hit the heady heights of other classics that have populated the genre. Besides the ill-fitting 3D backgrounds and scrappy presentation, it lacks the technical precision and meaty depth of *Capcom Vs SNK 2*. Unlike that game's six grooves, this offers one uniform super system for all characters, which doesn't offer nearly as much variety for players wanting to express their unique playing style. It's a shame, but given the accessibility and sheer variety of the characters on offer, one that can easily be overlooked. *Neo Geo Battle Coliseum* doesn't set out to reinvent the wheel or shift the beat-'em-up genre into new territory, but as a starting point for those who want eccentric characters to get stuck into without being overwhelmed by the gameplay, this is as good as the genre offers.

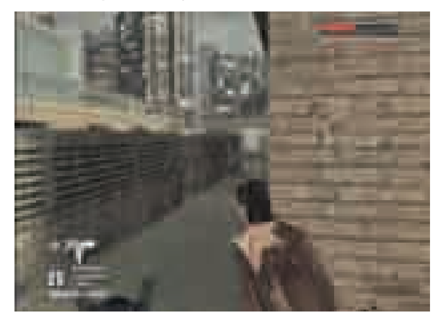



GOOD FUN AND INCREDIBLY ACCESSIBLE





Shooting cars will make them blow up, but to be honest with you, it's not really that fun… sigh.



The covering system is flawed, and you're more likely to 'sleep with the fishes' if you take advantage of it.



Say hello to Joey's little friend. This guy has to hear all about Joey's life – some things just aren't fair.

**MISSING LINK**

**WHAT'S MISSING FROM THIS TITLE**

**TLC:** *Made Man* is like any other third-person shooter, but it's lacking in the care department. Unlike *GTA*, you never feel any connection with Joey, so each mission seems similar and pointless.

# MADE MAN

## PROOF THAT AT TIMES, GANGSTERS AREN'T COOL… AT ALL

**DETAILS**



**FORMAT REVIEWED**
PlayStation2

**OTHER FORMATS:**
PC

**ORIGIN**
UK

**PUBLISHER**
Mastertronic

**DEVELOPER**
Silverback Studios

**PRICE**
£29.99

**RELEASE**
30 November

**PLAYERS**
1

**It's always a shame when a company collapses, and it was no different when Acclaim closed in 2004.** Although a number of its titles to be published were shelved indefinitely, some were saved from the wilderness – one such survivor was gangster shooter *Made Man*.

Here you take on the role of Joey Verola, an important player in a mob gang, and learn about his life. Your typical violent affair, *Made Man* would have been an average title had it been released five years ago; in 2006 this simply isn't up to standard. Each level, aside from the location, is very similar to the last, requiring you to run around killing anything that moves. And that's about it; there's little motivation throughout and you'll soon tire of its repetitiveness. Character models are crude and at times don't even open their mouths to talk. Aspects such as these are not essential to a game, but *Made Man* continually disappoints in all areas.

Controlling like an ordinary third-person shooter – the analogue sticks will move Joey, and the R1 trigger fires – this title desperately tries to spice proceedings up with an ill-fated cover system. Pressing X will send Joey ducking for cover, and it's almost impossible to shoot an enemy from a covered position without getting killed; it's easier to run straight at a bad guy and pump them full of lead. Saying that however, the AI is off the wall; some enemies will die after a single shot to the body whereas others can take countless bullets to the head without blinking – infuriating to say the least. Kill Rack activates *Made Man's* version of bullet time, and Retort Kill allows you to off wounded enemies with a point-blank shot to the face, but such novelties are little more than gimmicks and add nothing to the experience.

Silverback Studios is keen to mention that its story has been penned by David Fisher, a successful novelist who specialises in gangster narrative, and Bill Bonanno, a legitimate former gangster. If this is the case, then why is this game so generic? It's nothing more than a by-the-numbers gangster tale with numerous people getting shot and 'falling out of windows'. A weak effort to add depth has been attempted through a selection of Vietnam flashback missions, but these are among the worst in the game.

*Made Man* can only be recommended if you love to run around and shoot things for no real reason, and there are countless other games that do that better without the annoyances that accompany this stereotypical title. A game that really shouldn't have been rescued after the Acclaim closure.

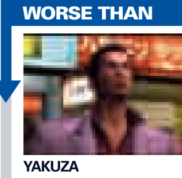
**VERDICT 3 /10**
NOTHING NEW, NOTHING EXCITING

BEING SHOT



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

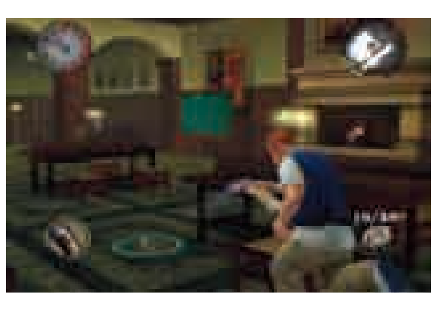


YAKUZA





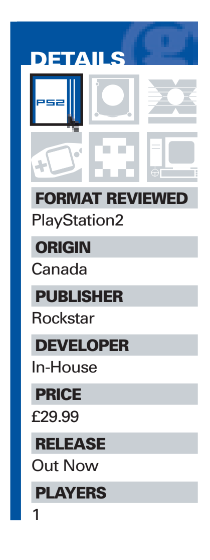
Courting controversy, *Canis Canem Edit* actually includes a range of side missions including simple schoolboy antics among 'other' things.


By the way, still life art does not involve painting graffiti onto actual living creatures.


English lessons take the form of an anagram game. This is harder than it looks, we can tell you.

# CANIS CANEM EDIT

## ROCKSTAR GIVES AN EDUCATION IN THE OPEN WORLD




**Praise be for Rockstar. Defiant of convention, courting controversy at every turn, the landscape of the new millennium would be unimaginable without its peculiar blend of scandal and innovation.** There's been blood, some of it gratuitous, but let's not forget the cowboys and street racers, the table tennis and vengeful detectives. Few developers have ever cast the net so wide, with such conviction, and great games have been our reward. But there's still the blood.

*Canis Canem Edit* could have been a casualty of that well-earned reputation. Originally titled *Bully*, as if you didn't know, the gap between the initial utterance of that provocative word and the first clear indication of the game's content was enough to create a void into which all manner of unfounded, nannyish vitriol could be poured. There can be no complaint from Rockstar when it comes to the title change; politics loves a vacuum, and it won many enemies when it answered concerns over the violence in *GTA* with the oppressive brutality of *Manhunt*. Like we say, the reputation is well earned, though the cumbersome new moniker does suggest a deliberate ploy to force the public to stick to the catchier original.

In truth, *Bully* is somewhat misleading. There is ritualistic violence in Bullworth Academy, but being the flame-haired new kid it is most often aimed at you. An opening cut-scene paints a far-from-happy family picture as Jimmy is callously discarded at the school gates by his self-involved, abusive parents. Jimmy's troubled background has instilled a deep-seated sense of inequality within him, and, at least initially, the main objective is to restore order between the school's warring cliques by gaining the respect of each.

That these cliques are Nerds, Jocks, Greasers, Preppies and Dropouts is indicative of the tone. Closer in spirit to the romanticised whimsy of John Hughes than the censor-baiting realism of Larry Clark, in *CCE* the guns are catapults, the cars are pushbikes and assault is a wedgie or Chinese burn. Rockstar has never released a more good-natured product; the characters are well-worn stereotypes, the humour is broad, and an atmosphere of goofy wellbeing hangs over the game from the first moment to the last.

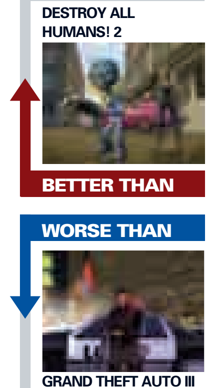
As in *GTA*, access to Bullworth and the surrounding town is staggered. The game is split into five sections comprising one school year, with each section devoted to winning favour with a new clique and allowing you to explore a new area of the map. There are the usual array of shops and services at your disposal – haircuts, fashion, groceries – some integral to your progress, some mere decoration. *CCE* isn't a game of overwhelming ambition – as *San Andreas* sometimes was – and your environment reflects this. Perhaps it is the absence of fast

### FAQs

**Q. OKAY, LET'S TALK GIRLS?**
Don't worry, you can kiss them.

**Q. A LITTLE PERSUASION?**
Flowers and chocolate do the trick.

**Q. ANY SIDE EFFECTS?**
A health boost should you get it right, a knee in the nuts if not.



■ Marbles can be laid on the floor to put your pursuers on their backsides.

■ Buy a girl some flowers and you might get a kiss… or a knee in the groin.

vehicles, perhaps it is that the town doesn't live in the way that *San Andreas* or *Vice City* did, but there is an unusual absence of that desire to just forsake the task at hand and explore. This is an altogether more focused game, an aspect that complements the lightness of the material.

This lack of desire to probe is also testament to the quality of the story missions. Rockstar has imagined hundreds of scenarios for the *GTA* universe, and even the staunchest of supporters would admit that, at times, there was a tendency toward repetition. This is a facet inherent in the design; mission variety will always be limited by the core gameplay mechanics, it's the little twists applied to the formula that bring a feeling of freshness.

The schoolyard setting affords Rockstar a whole new palette. Where once you might have been assassinating a mob boss while avoiding his marauding cronies, now you're dodging the tackles of football players while firing a catapult at the team mascot. At one time you might have been ramming a drug dealer's car off the road in a hail of bullets, but now you're chasing a thieving nerd on your bike, pelting him with rotten eggs. The curious predilection of the open world for gratuitous violence has aged the concept prematurely; *CCE* is a shining example of how well it can work with a little invention.

There are flaws to the scholastic proceedings. The side missions do feel like just that, and it's tough to muster the energy to mow a lawn, take a paper round or compete in yet another bike race for a few bucks when progress through story mode is so rapid and satisfying. There are supposedly 15 hours of gameplay here, and though we would argue that it was slightly more, an accomplished gamer would find few reasons to repeat a mission until at least halfway through *CCE's* entertaining tale. It is a brief experience, and one that ultimately feels inconsequential, but Rockstar's gift for salty humour and broad characterisation is ideally suited to the playground. Not only is this its finest game outside *GTA*, it's arguably the best open-world game since too. It was only ever going to be Rockstar, and praise be for that.

**VERDICT 8/10**

**LIGHT, BRIEF AND NEAR IMPOSSIBLE NOT TO LIKE**

**games™ MISSING LINK**

**WHAT ONE THING WOULD YOU**

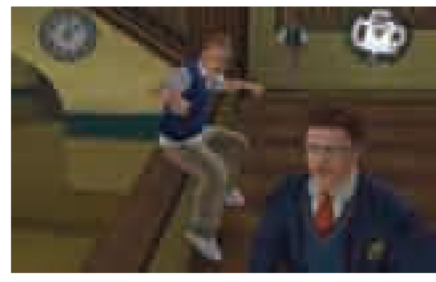
**GRITTY REALISM:** As well crafted as Bullworth is, it's still a view of high school through the filter of American movies. It's not Rockstar's style, but we'd love to see the game given a more realistic edge.

## A CLASS ACT

**Lessons are cunningly integrated into the gameplay. Each class takes the form of a mini-game split into five increasingly difficult sections; passing them will reward your character with useful attributes, fail and you must wait to try again. For example, English is an anagram game that'll improve your ability to give excuses when caught; Art is a rehash of *Qix*, and will grant you a health boost when you kiss a girl; Chemistry is a rhythm-response task and leaves you with the knowledge to make stink bombs, itching powder and other instruments of mischief. You can play truant of course, but it's to Rockstar's credit that *Canis Canem Edit* makes skipping class the less attractive option.**



■ Swap transistors with the hobo that lives behind the school for some free fighting lessons.



■ Jimmy can slide down any banister he comes across. Very useful for making a getaway.

IT'S CALLED KILLZONE FOR A REASON, YOU KNOW

# KILLZONE: LIBERATION

**DETAILS**



**FORMAT REVIEWED**
PlayStation Portable

**ORIGIN**
Netherlands

**PUBLISHER**
Sony Computer Entertainment

**DEVELOPER**
Guerrilla Games

**PRICE**
£34.99

**RELEASE**
Out Now

**PLAYERS**
1-6

**Two months after the events of the game's predecessor on PS2, a tumultuous battle is still raging against the Helghast.** Their General, Metrac, is pursuing all means to succeed, ranging from hostage taking to tactical truce offerings. Returning as ISA troop Jan Templar, you play to take down his forces in a covert mission to aid the ISA's fight for liberty.

Taking a top-down view of the action as opposed to its first-person older brother, *Liberation* has a tendency to feel like titles such as *Cannon Fodder* and *Commando*. The difference, however, is the advanced techniques that are employable – from gambolling, grenade lugging, crouching and strafing to issuing orders, all without Pause menu disturbance. This is also wrapped in an impressive graphical setting, with detailed landscapes and realistic elemental effects clearly evident in the game's fire and watery hazes. Environments are very well designed too, playing host to all these abilities and providing many an opportunity to take effective cover and attack wisely. Doing so is something you'll need to master too.

It feels cruel to nit-pick at the control's deficiencies considering this effort, however, there are problems. Issuing orders is far from practical, requiring you to press up on the D-pad while your thumb is on the analogue below. Gambols require a double-tap on the L shoulder button, leaving your reflexes slow when a rocket is making a beeline for your head, and aiming can be tricky too. Slight twitches on the analogue can send your view veering wildly – highly unhelpful when you're trying to lock on to an enemy. When it does click together however, it feels impeccably smooth and fun to utilise.

*Killzone* is pretty tough. Missions can last 20 minutes and leave you grateful for checkpoints, but despite this, and any death grievances, the game is fun, and you never feel hard done by. If you die, you know it's because the game has beaten you, and you'll strive to better yourself rather than berate shortcomings in AI or level design. And there's always the vendetta motivation to silence the "Make him suffer" and "Die, ISA scum" screams of the guards who killed you.

There is a lot on offer here, with jet packs and hovercraft also thrown in for good measure, a co-op campaign, challenges, wireless six-player multi-player, and that sensation of elation and relief upon completing missions. *Killzone: Liberation* has considerable depth that really manages to please.

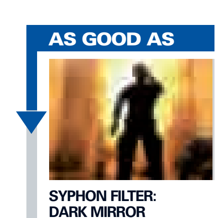
**VERDICT 7/10**
A VALIANT EFFORT WITH DECENT RESULTS

50 CENT: BULLETPROOF G UNIT EDITION



BETTER THAN

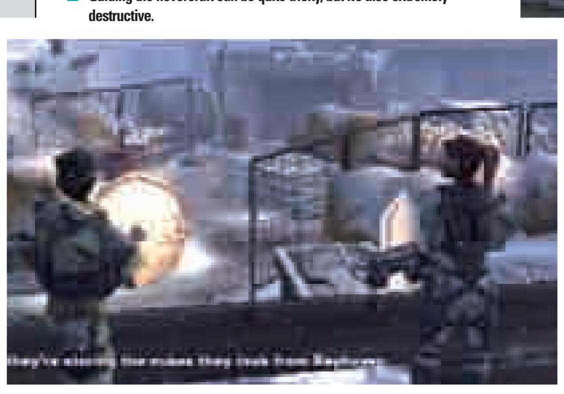
AS GOOD AS



SYPHON FILTER: DARK MIRROR



Guiding the hovercraft can be quite tricky, but it's also extremely destructive.





Things really start to heat up in *Killzone: Liberation* when the flame-throwers turn up.

**games™ MISSING LINK**
WHAT'S MISSING FROM THIS TITLE
**BROKEN ARROWS:** Despite a certain linearity, occasionally you find yourself wandering at a loss, eager to shoot some robot scum. Some directional arrows would have been nice.

# DESTROY ALL HUMANS! 2

## FILLING THE AIR WITH LASERS, METEORS AND KNOB JOKES



**FORMAT REVIEWED**
Xbox
**OTHER FORMATS:**
PlayStation2
**ORIGIN**
US
**PUBLISHER**
THQ
**DEVELOPER**
Pandemic
**PRICE**
£39.99
**RELEASE**
Out Now
**PLAYERS**
2

**Is there anything less funny than the same joke told twice? It's a masterpiece of a gag that still seems fresh the second time through.** *Destroy All Humans!* gleaned much of its appeal from the streak of irreverent humour that underscored the action. The idea was original, and that glossed over a few of its cracks. *Destroy All Humans! 2*'s major failing is that the originality that buoyed the first title has lost its sheen; the joke simply isn't as funny any more.

Even so, *DAH!2* does all that you could ask of a sequel. The original was no masterpiece, and improving on it hardly presented the greatest challenge, but Pandemic has clearly struggled against making a by-the-numbers re-tread, by broadening the scope and bringing extra depth to the gameplay. There is a more open-world feel this time that allows you to complete the story and side missions at your own pace. There are no open doors and the NPCs are formed from a handful of designs and stock responses, but this is extra gloss and it's much appreciated.

The game is spread over several locations; when you've completed the story missions for one, the next becomes available. This globe-hopping aspect is the source of *Destroy All Humans! 2*'s variety, and also opens up the possibilities for humour as it provides Pandemic with several social stereotypes to riff on rather than just one. Japan, Britain, the KGB, the Sixties, hippies, all are gleefully sent up, but seldom does the sex-obsessed Crypto raise more than a smile; the jokes are largely crude, unless you find hippies named 'Coyote Bongwater' particularly funny, that is. Yet there is something curiously addictive about the premise. It is refreshing to play in an open world not obsessed with gangsters and crime, and so the weak jokes are easily excused.

Besides, *DAH!2* tries its heart out to provide the player with a fresh experience. There are new weapons including a Meteor Strike capable of levelling a building; you can now abduct people and splice their genes to unlock new powers; this being the Sixties, you can also telepathically fill the head of anybody pursuing you with 'Free Love', making them dance in a haze of flowers. Even the lack of mission variety is compensated through the inclusion of a co-op mode – a tried and tested method for giving the illusion of depth and adding replay value. The first game was an acquired taste, leaving some in raptures and some out in the cold. *Destroy All Humans! 2*'s scope should win a few converts, while providing enough originality to sate the fans.

**games™ ENHANCED**
**IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL**
**TEAM WORK:** Co-op mode gives the game added depth and rewards repeat play.
**OPEN WORLD:** The environments may be sterile, but there is much more freedom this time.

**DESTROY ALL HUMANS!**



**BETTER THAN**

**WORSE THAN**



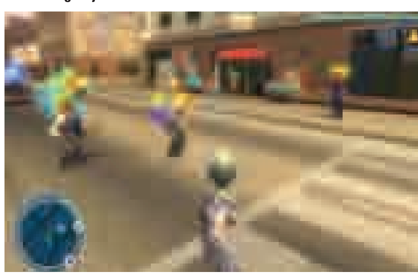
**GRAND THEFT AUTO III**



**VERDICT 7/10**
**FANS OF THE ORIGINAL WILL LAP THIS UP**



Missions based in Japan will see you going head to head with warring ninja factions.



Crypto can transmit feelings of love to those pursuing him, resulting in a full-blown freak out.



The Meteor Strike allows you to deface all manner of national monuments.




Who’re you calling ‘chicken’? **The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past [Nintendo] 1991**


LIFE


eMag


RETRO
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AN IMAGINE PUBLICATION
NO.50 NOV 2006
00p
BEHIND THE SCENES SMASH TV
Eugene Jarvis reveals all
NINTENDO SECRETS
The coin-ops that time forgot
PLUS
RETRO NEWS, REVIEWS,
CLASH OF THE TITANS,
GAMES THAT TIME FORGOT
THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION,
WORST LICENCE EVER
AND MORE…
VIRTUAL CONSOLE EXPLODES
C64 and MSX heading for NintendoWii
BUYERS' GUIDE
RETRO GEAR
Your complete guide to the classic consoles and illustrious software

# RETRO NEWS

*Find out what's going on in the here and now of retro gaming*

The Virtual Console has, I have to admit, got me quite excited this month. The thought of playing some of my favourite games without having to hunt down an original cartridge, or frequent a legally dodgy website is an encouraging one, but I'd like to point out that such downloads are not the be-all and end-all of retro gaming. In reality, there's nothing quite like an original cartridge, complete with its dusty packaging and wrinkled instruction book. Sure, that's just the nostalgia talking but that nostalgia can often be as important to retro gaming as the game itself. Also, we should not forget that the Virtual Console is only a limited service and there will still be hundreds of games that don't make it to the Wii. I'd be very surprised if some of the best import titles like *Sin & Punishment* or *Umihara Kawase* ever appear on Europe's Virtual Consoles and, as we've pointed out in this very issue, Nintendo currently has no plans to bring arcade games to the Wii, despite competitors like Microsoft forging ahead with the idea.

So enjoy playing the original *Mario Kart* over the net and downloading that *Metal Gear* cartridge you couldn't afford on eBay, but don't forget that old console you have hidden away in the loft. There are plenty of real, tangible games out there that you won't be seeing online any time soon. Don't let them fade into obscurity.

**Ashley Day**
retro@imagine-publishing.co.uk

## BACK FROM THE DEAD

### NEW MSX COMPUTER AND VIRTUAL CONSOLE SUPPORT

Now, here's a piece of news you don't see every day. Over a decade after the MSX home computer bit the dust, the machine is set to be re-launched with a brand new design and new games. MSX may not be well known in the UK but as one of the first machines to play host to such classics as *Metal Gear*, *Castlevania* and *Aleste*, it's well worth checking out.

The new machine, dubbed the One Chip, will feature two cartridge slots for playing original games as well as an SD slot for playing downloaded disk images. The classic computer is also set to make a comeback through Nintendo's Virtual Console service, as D4E – the Japanese company behind the One Chip – will be distributing vintage MSX games through the Wii. It's unknown whether the service will be available outside Japan, but we certainly hope so.

Bazix, a software company from the Netherlands, is handling the European side of the MSX revival. We exclusively interviewed its spokesman, Sander Zuidema.

**games™:** How many One Chips will be available from launch and how much can we expect to pay?

**Bazix:** Of the initial batch of 5,000 One Chip MSX computers, we expect to distribute 500 in Europe. On our website we will soon announce the sale price, our target is to distribute it at (or under) 170 Euros exc-VAT.

**g™:** How can we play our games on the One Chip?

**B:** The SD/MMC card reader functions exactly like an ordinary disk drive – albeit a very large and fast one. By transferring files from disks to an SD or MMC card, you can enjoy disk-based software with great ease of use. In some cases software used a file system different from the common FAT12 system, in this case you can use a tool to create and run disk images from the SD card.




**g™:** What downloadable games can we expect for the One Chip?

**B:** In Japan, D4E is planning to distribute games on their distribution network 'Amusement Center'. Bazix is soon to launch WOOMB.net, the English counterpart of this game distribution network. At Amusement Center, hundreds of games are already available for Windows, which will gradually be added to the WOOMB.net catalog. If the distribution of these titles for the One Chip MSX proves to be successful in Japan it is likely to be implemented in WOOMB as well. WOOMB.net will launch in October with games from Compile, T&E Soft and Playlogic, while several Microcabin titles are already in line for release.

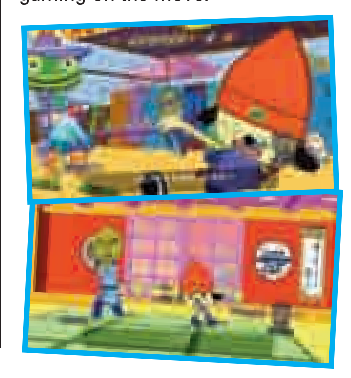
Interested readers should visit www.bazix.nl/onechipmsx.html and sign up to the newsletter if they hope to buy a machine. Those 500 units won't last long.

# KICK. PUNCH. IT'S ALL IN THE MIND

***PARAPPA THE RAPPER RETURNS***

As one of the very first rhythm-action games in history, *PaRappa The Rapper* occupies a very special place in our retro heart. The original PSOne game was an unexpected smash hit when it was released in 1996, mostly due to the innovative music-based gameplay, which spawned an army of imitators and went on to be one of the most popular genres of the late-Nineties and early-Noughties. Now, on the eve of the game's tenth anniversary, the original is due to be remade for PlayStation Portable. It is set to be a straight port, retaining the trademark graphics, with only a four-player wireless mode added.

While we would usually frown on such a 'vanilla' release, it should be noted that none of the other *PaRappa The Rapper* sequels have so far managed to capture the magic of the original and also that the ability to play the game on a handheld should add a new way to appreciate this landmark PlayStation title. With levels that last only a couple of minutes this could be the ideal game for short bursts of classic gaming on the move.



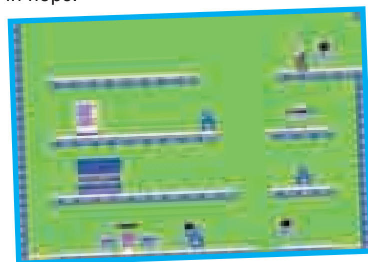
# NINTENDO TURNS 64

***COMMODORE 64 COMING TO Wii***

In addition to the wonderful news that MSX games will join NES, SNES, N64, Mega Drive and PC engine on Wii's Virtual Console, we're pleased to report that the mighty Commodore 64 has also been added to the emulation service, bringing the total number of supported systems to seven.

Courtesy of *Nintendo Power* magazine in the US, we know that Commodore 64 games will definitely appear on Wii at some point, but nobody currently knows when they will appear, how much they will cost or even which titles will be available. Rumours do suggest however, that UK publisher System 3 will be lending several games from the Epyx back catalogue including *Impossible Mission*, *California Games* and *Gateway To Apshai*. If such games are priced reasonably (around 50p, we reckon) and the loading times are eliminated, then this can only be good news for prospective Wii owners.

The announcement also raises questions about which other machines will eventually make their way on to the Virtual Console. While it's probably unrealistic to expect to see Saturn and Amiga support – thanks to the machines' complicated chipsets – it seems reasonable that slightly older machines such as the Atari 2600 and even the Neo Geo might some day get the Virtual Console treatment. We can only live in hope.






***Old-school gaming is on the up, so games™ dedicates itself to keeping you up to date with what's going down in the world of retro.***

## NOVEMBER '06

### THE SETTLERS

**Date:** 03 November **Publisher:** Ubisoft **Price:** £29.99 **Format:** DS

Old-school Amiga fans will recognise *Settlers* as a classic RTS with lovable cartoon graphics. Later PC versions lost the cartoon charm, but the style is back for the DS version along with brand new gameplay tailored toward the innovative handheld. The DS stylus is perfect for these types of game, and it looks like *The Settlers* might be the first to really take advantage of that fact.

### FINAL FANTASY V ADVANCE

**Date:** 06 November **Publisher:** SquareEnix **Price:** $29.99 **Format:** GBA

*Final Fantasy IV Advance* has barely landed on these shores, but America will soon be getting the next in the series. It'll be well into 2007 before *Final Fantasy V* sees the light of day here – if at all – so importing is a good idea. *FFV* was the first *Final Fantasy* to feature the Job system, and played brilliantly thanks to its inclusion, this remake should therefore be at the top of any RPG lover's wish list.

### CAPCOM CLASSICS COLLECTION RELOADED

**Date:** 10 November **Publisher:** Capcom **Price:** £34.99 **Format:** PSP

The flood of Capcom re-releases continues with the second PSP *Classics Collection*. Although it features many games that appeared on the first PS2 compilation – including *Street Fighter II*, *Ghosts 'N Goblins* and *Commando* – there'll be a number of upgrades including game sharing multi-player versions of six of the bundled games.

### FINAL FANTASY III

**Date:** 14 November **Publisher:** SquareEnix **Price:** $39.99 **Format:** DS

Like *Final Fantasy V* before it, this 3D remake of the ancient Famicom RPG will be out in the US long before Europe. It's perfectly playable on a European DS so you'd be silly not to import what has to be one of the most anticipated games of the year. The RRP is a little high for our liking, but we've seen some retailers letting it go for as little as $34. Shop around.

## DECEMBER '06

### VIRTUAL CONSOLES

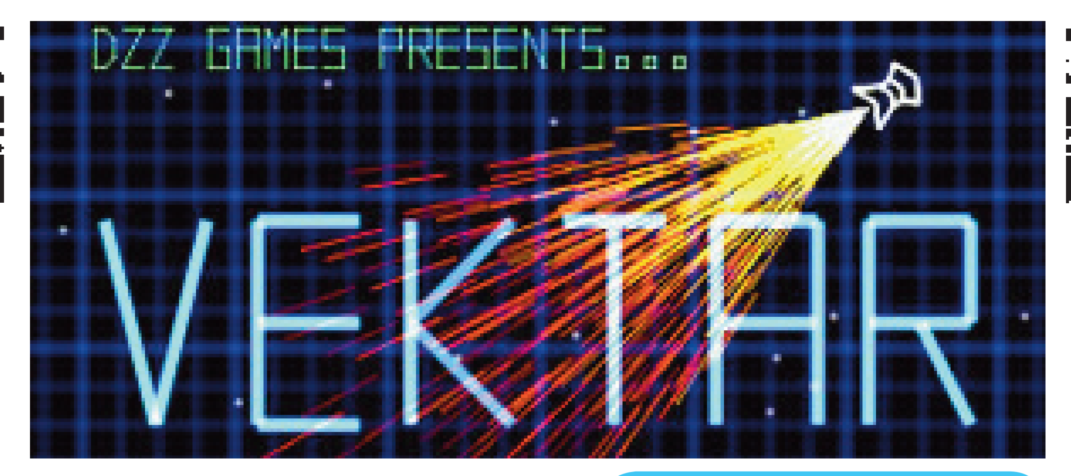
**Date:** 08 December **Publisher:** Nintendo **Price:** Varies**Format:** Wii

Buy a brand new Wii on 8 December and not only will you have one of the most exciting consoles in the history of the universe, but you'll also be able to download old games for NES, SNES, N64, Mega Drive, PC Engine and (possibly) Commodore 64 and MSX. We really can't wait for this one.

### PUYO PUYO – FIFTEENTH ANNIVERSARY

**Date:** 14 December **Publisher:** Sega **Price:** ¥5,040 **Format:** DS

Celebrating its fifteenth birthday this December, *Puyo Puyo* – the series' Famicom and MSX debut – is making its second appearance on DS. Gameplay changes are expected to be few, but the release is worth noting because it'll be fully playable over the Internet. *Puyo Puyo* is one of Retro's favourite puzzlers, so we'll see you online.




# RETRO DEVOLVED

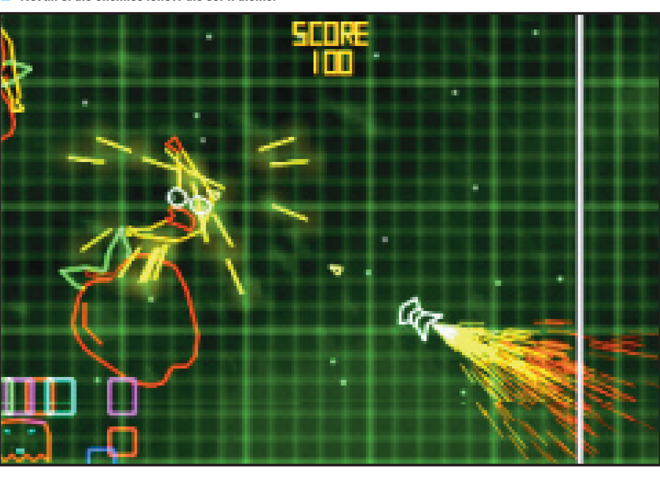
**Format:** GP2X
**Publisher:** GP32 Distribution
**Developer:** DZZ + Craigix
**Price:** £19.99

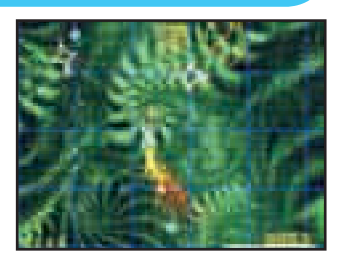
Although it is primarily a homebrew oriented console, the GP2X handheld is slowly developing a catalogue of commercially released games, thanks largely to the efforts of the UK-based GP32 Distribution. The first of those releases is *Vektar*: an arena-based shoot-'em-up that liberally borrows from *Asteroids* and *Geometry Wars*.

Visually, the game far outclasses almost every other GP2X title to date. Neon-lit vector-style graphics pierce the console's screen, creating a light show that most obviously recalls the stunning work of Bizarre Creations' *Geometry Wars*. And although the presentation isn't quite as polished as the Xbox 360 game, *Vektar* definitely looks good enough to show off the GP2X to your friends with.

Unlike the graphics however, *Vektar's* gameplay is well and truly stuck in the past. The earliest levels resemble Atari's vector-based videogame *Asteroids* as the ship is thrown into an open space with several drifting adversaries to blast to pieces. Just like *Asteroids* the ship can be thrust forwards and can only fire in one direction, although if enough momentum is gained it is possible to float backwards while firing. Unlike *Asteroids*, there is a protective shield at the player's disposal, though its use is limited to a few short seconds.

Not all of the enemies follow the sci-fi theme.



There's no denying just how gorgeous *Vektar* looks.

As the game progresses, the levels become increasingly complex. New enemies with difficult attack patterns appear while the arena levels are replaced with maze-like structures with sentry guns in each room. The last level of each world pits the player against a boss enemy that's usually themed around an animal of some sort. The first being a sheep, presumably as a tribute to woolly mammal-lover Jeff Minter, without whom this sub-genre of shoot-'em-up would quite likely never have been possible.

On the surface, there's very little to find fault with in *Vektar*. The graphics are of a high quality; the licensed soundtrack evokes a suitably trance-like feel and the controls are completely responsive. All the groundwork has been laid to build a compelling shooter, but the game is let down by its unbalanced difficulty curve. The first few levels are very easy to get through even before you realise that they can be beaten by simply sitting in one corner and blasting everything that floats past. The later levels, on the other hand, tip the scale to the opposite end as the player is dropped into very confined spaces, packed with enemies that immediately make a beeline for the player. In such instances it's possible to barge through the crowds of nasties to a safe spot but only if the player has enough shield reserves and extra lives. Such problems suggest that *Vektar's* testing process was focused more on eliminating bugs – of which we found none – rather than tweaking the level design.

When *Vektar's* levels don't throw the player into impossible situations however, the game does offer a solid session of shooting thrills. Like its inspirations, the game delivers a rush of adrenaline that comes from the combined effect of the one-against-all gameplay and the club scene presentation. A bundled replacement joystick cap sweetens the deal further by improving on the GP2X's inadequate original stick to make *Vektar* (and any other GP2X game) control much better than it would have.

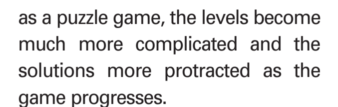
As the GP2X's first commercial release, *Vektar* is a welcome product with a great deal more polish than many of the console's free games. The trouble here is that it is also unfortunately handicapped by its punishing level design.



When *Vektar* gets this complicated we yearn for the earlier (and superior) levels.

**OVERALL SCORE 61%**

# THE BUBBLE'S FINALLY BURST


**Format:** PlayStation Portable
**Publisher:** Rising Star Games
**Developer:** Marvelous Interactive
**Price:** £34.99


Graphically, *Evolution* looks brilliant. If only the game didn't zoom out so much.

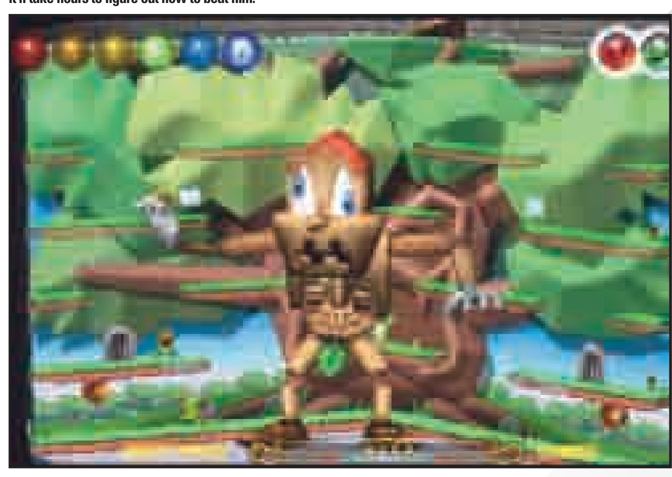
Marvelous Interactive's various remakes of classic Taito arcade games have certainly put the cat among the pigeons. Although the excellent *Space Invaders Evolution* was well received the developer has since produced nothing but disappointments. *Rainbow Islands*, *Bubble Bobble* and *Space Invaders* were all remade and reinvented for the DS and each one proved to be a dismal failure. Now Marvelous is looking to put right a few wrongs with its latest PSP release, *Bubble Bobble Evolution*.

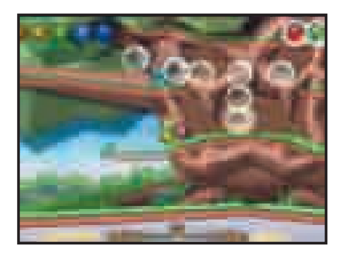
Now, before this review gets into full swing, it's worth making clear that *Bubble Bobble Evolution* has very little in common with the classic coin-op of old. Yes, you still blow bubbles at enemies and partake of the occasional spot of platform jumping, but that's really where the similarity ends. Instead, Marvelous has chosen to create a puzzle-platform hybrid that, while not as disastrous as *Bubble Bobble Revolution* on DS, doesn't quite reach the dizzying heights of the original game.

The premise of *Bubble Bobble Evolution* is that Bub and Bob (who, for unknown reasons, are no longer dinosaurs but just kids in dino-suits) have been imprisoned in two separate towers that they must ascend, by beating each level and boss, until they reach the top and are reunited. Each level is cylindrical in shape and divided into three segments, connected by locked doors. The aim of each level is to guide Bub and Bob to an elevator, which must be revealed and unlocked by finding all the right switches and items that are required to do so. Needless to say, as a puzzle game, the levels become much more complicated and the solutions more protracted as the game progresses.

Successful level completion leads to a boss battle, which is where the game's biggest flaw becomes apparent. Unlike previous iterations of the *Bubble Bobble* franchise, the bosses cannot simply be defeated with standard attacks, but must be destroyed by manipulating elements of the level that can affect the giant creatures. In many of these battles it's not always clear what those elements actually do or how they can be activated, so careful examination of the stage and reference to the Tutorial mode is essential. And even

Here's the first boss, he does sod all damage, but it'll take hours to figure out how to beat him.





when it's obvious what to do, the clumsy controls and occasionally sloppy collision detection place victory just out of the grasp of all but the most determined players. The frustration of the boss battles is compounded further still by the task of defeating each boss twice: a needless requirement that will bore those who want to breeze on to the next level, and anger those who struggled with the same boss the first time around.

The need to use the tutorials can actually be applied to most levels in the game, as each stage is full of tiny elements that are so small it's very difficult to work out what they are – especially on PSP's relatively small screen. The best puzzle games overcome this problem with obviously designed icons (see any version of *Lemmings* for a great example), so it's a shame that Marvelous didn't take the time to signpost the puzzles a little more.

Although long-time *Bubble Bobble* fans will initially recoil in horror that their favourite platform game has been shoehorned into a puzzler, there is some value in *Bubble Bobble Evolution*. Persevere through the tutorials and learn to spot the key items among the bubbles and enemies, and the game will eventually unfold into an above-average puzzle adventure. Getting to that point does require a lot of patience however, so we can only really recommend this to diehard puzzle fans willing to see past the design flaws that unfortunately prevent *Bubble Bobble Evolution* from being the great game it could so easily have turned out to be.

**OVERALL SCORE**
**59%**




# NINTEN
# SECRET ARCA

**RETRO DELVES INTO NINTENDO'S MURKIEST WATERS AND EMERGES WITH A HANDFUL OF CLASSICS YOU PROBABLY WON'T BE SEEING ON A VIRTUAL CONSOLE ANY TIME SOON**

**In about a month from now, Nintendo's newest, most groundbreaking console will be hitting Europe.** The entire games-playing world is working itself into a rabid frenzy over the thought of getting to grips with the innovative new motion controls, but here at Retro we have other Nintendo-flavoured delights on our mind. The Virtual Console – Nintendo Wii's built-in emulator for NES, SNES, N64, Mega Drive and PC Engine – is set to bring hundreds of old-school classics to the masses through the technological marvel that is the Internet, and we couldn't be more excited. Like everyone who's into retro games, we've been daydreaming about exactly which classics will appear on the service and there's one thought that keeps relentlessly bubbling to the service. What about the arcade games?

Nintendo isn't exactly known for its arcade games so you might be surprised to hear that it actually developed quite a few and that some of them were really rather good. Sure, everyone knows about *Donkey Kong* and *Mario Bros* – the arcade games that kick-started Miyamoto's videogame career – but there are in fact a wealth of great arcade games that never received the attention they deserved, or have been forgotten throughout the sands of time. And while we won't kid ourselves that many of these games will never appear on Wii's download service, there's always the possibility that Nintendo might some day put together a compilation, á là *Taito Legends*, for the DS or Wii. In the meantime, why not join us as we take a look at some of Nintendo's long-forgotten coin-operated classics…



▼ *Mario Kart Arcade* was the first in the series to feature non-Nintendo characters.

▶ The NES conversion of *Popeye* left a lot to be desired.

▲ Nintendo doesn't often do licensed games, but when it does it does them well.

# DO'S DE HISTORY



## Sheriff

**SCORE: 70%**

**YEAR:** 1979 **PLAYERS:** 2 **CONVERTED TO:** GBA (sort of)



**There's no better place to start a history lesson than at the beginning, but already we've hit a stumbling block.** Nintendo's first three arcade titles were released in 1979, but documentation on the period is non-existent and so we don't know exactly which came first. If we had to hazard a guess (which we do) then we'd bet that *Sheriff* (also known as *Bandido* in some countries) was the first. Nintendo itself seems to regard the game quite fondly – a cut-down version appeared as a mini-game in the first *WarioWare* – so we're probably on the right track. Anyway, *Sheriff* is a shooting game in which the player must fend off encircling bandits by shooting in any direction. A level ends once all of the bandits have been killed, and shooting the vultures that fly across the top of the screen will award the player with bonus points. *Sheriff* is actually quite difficult to play, largely thanks to the unorthodox controls – a stick to move and a rotating button for aiming and firing – that almost recall *Robotron* in design but don't quite replicate its usability in execution. Nevertheless, this is a fun little shooter that, like many of Nintendo's earliest titles, is notable for its lack of cute, kiddy appeal and emphasis on adult violence.

**CHANCE OF RESURRECTION:** ■■■■■□□□□□

## Space Fever

**SCORE: 50%**

**YEAR:** 1979 **PLAYERS:** 2 **CONVERTED TO:** Arcade Only



**The Nintendo of 2006 is widely regarded as one of the last bastions of innovation and originality in the videogame industry, so it's quite shocking to see that one of its first games was a blatant rip-off of one that appeared a year earlier.** Yes, *Space Fever* is a shameless clone of Taito's landmark arcade hit, *Space Invaders*. Every part of the game is almost the same, right down to the way the aliens move down the screen, and the mother ship that zips along the top. The only significant differences are that three variations of the game – with slightly different attack patterns – can be selected from and that the aliens' bullets can be blocked with a well-placed shot. Two different versions of *Space Fever* exist – one black-and-white and the other in colour – and each cabinet is now just as rare as the other.

With Nintendo's reputation as a trendsetter rather than follower, we'd be incredibly surprised if *Space Fever* ever resurfaces from the obscurity it currently resides in, so this particular relic from Nintendo's past will probably stay buried forever. Still, if you've never played *Space Fever* then we can't say you're missing much. Just load up *Space Invaders* and imagine the aliens are all different colours and you'll more or less get the same experience.

**CHANCE OF RESURRECTION:** ■■□□□□□□□□

## Space Launcher

**YEAR:** 1979 **PLAYERS:** 2 **CONVERTED TO:** Arcade Only



**This is more like it. Although *Space Launcher* may look like another *Space Invaders* clone in still imagery, it's actually a much cleverer, more inventive game.** Sitting somewhere between the aforementioned classic and Konami's *Frogger*, *Space Launcher* puts the player in control of a guided missile that must work its way through the aliens, to a base at the top and then back down again. There doesn't appear to be any level progression as play continues until the player runs out of lives. Acquiring a high score is the name of the game and there are various methods of doing so. A head-on collision with an alien will accrue 50 points on the way to the top and 100 points on the way back down (any other collision will result in the loss of a life), while landing in a base at the top of the screen will award the player with a random amount of points depending on the base's constantly changing value. The only problem with *Space Launcher* is that, despite its inherent originality, the game does quickly become very repetitive. Once you've mastered the art of boosting back and forth without dying, there really is nothing else to do.

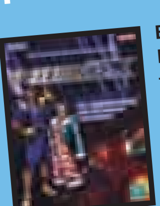
**CHANCE OF RESURRECTION:**



**SCORE: 65%**

## CONTEMPORARY COIN-OPS

### F-ZERO AX



BY THE EARLY Noughties, Nintendo had been out of the arcade race for some time but made a surprise announcement in 2002 when it revealed a powerful, new arcade board called Triforce. Co-developed by Nintendo, Sega and Namco, this arcade system was based on GameCube technology but with significant graphical enhancements. The trio of super-developers' first offering was *F-Zero AX*. The game played like Cube's *F-Zero GX* but with original courses and a cab that moved with the player's actions, even slamming the seat back when boosting. Progress could be saved to a credit-card-sized memory card that even allowed achievements to be printed directly on to its surface. GameCube memory cards could also be inserted into the cabinet unlocking new tracks for *F-Zero GX*.

## Radar Scope

SCORE: 72%

**YEAR:** 1980 **PLAYERS:** 2 **CONVERTED TO:** Arcade Only



**Radar Scope is infamous among Nintendo fans for being the videogame that the Japanese software giant hoped would capture the attention of a growing American videogame audience.** Unfortunately, the game flopped in the States and two thirds of the cabinets were recalled to Nintendo and converted into *Donkey Kong* machines. The general assumption is that *Radar Scope* flopped because it was a bad game but, in actual fact, it is an extremely impressive single-screen shooter. Retro believes that Nintendo's timing was to blame for the game's failure as, by 1980 the world had become tired of *Space Invaders* and was looking for something new, which is how *Pac-Man* and, later, *Donkey Kong* were able to capture the imagination of so many gamers. *Radar Scope* plays a lot like a cross between *Space Invaders* and Namco's *Galaxian* with the invaders starting far into the horizon and making individual attacks on the player before swooping back into formation. The game plays very well – better than the company's other *Space Invaders* derivatives – and really didn't deserve to fail so spectacularly.

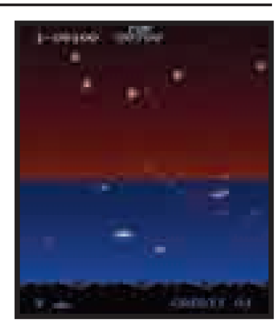
**CHANCE OF RESURRECTION:**



## Heli Fire

SCORE: 37%

**YEAR:** 1980 **PLAYERS:** 2 **CONVERTED TO:** Arcade Only



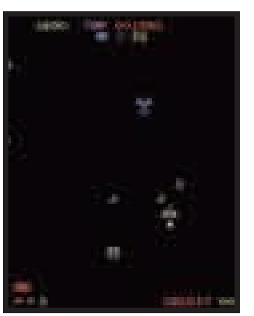
**For a company that's not exactly notorious for its shoot-'em-ups, Nintendo sure made a hell of a lot of them in its early years, and playing *Heli Fire* gives us a clear indication of why it doesn't produce shooters today.** The player takes control of a submarine which can be moved in eight directions to avoid undersea threats while simultaneously shooting at the helicopters that fly above. Despite its original theme, the game still feels incredibly tired.

There's really nothing that makes *Heli Fire* stand out from the crowd of similar shooters released in the late-Seventies and early-Eighties, and as a result the game quickly becomes dull and tedious. What's more, the difficultly is so high that, at times, it's totally unfair – the major cause for complaint being the completely unavoidable barrage of torpedoes that move from right to left across the screen. This is an old-school Nintendo title that definitely doesn't give Mario and Zelda a run for their money.

**CHANCE OF RESURRECTION:**

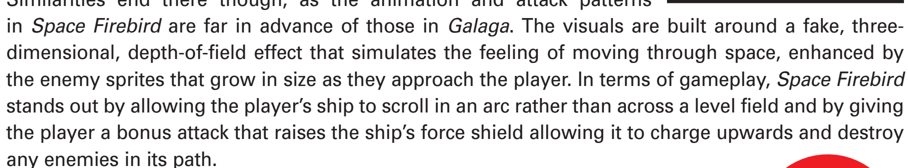
## Space Firebird

**YEAR:** 1980 **PLAYERS:** 2 **CONVERTED TO:** Arcade Only



**Okay, we promise this is the last shoot-'em-up we'll mention in this Nintendo feature.** *Space Firebird*, which is also known as *Space Demon*, plays a lot like *Galaga*, and you'd be forgiven for thinking that this was another case of the old Nintendo ripping off another game but – gasp – this one was actually made a year before Namco's classic blaster.

Like the aforementioned *Galaga*, the enemies in *Space Firebird* move in small groups and attack in waves before returning to the top of the screen. Similarities end there though, as the animation and attack patterns in *Space Firebird* are far in advance of those in *Galaga*. The visuals are built around a fake, three-dimensional, depth-of-field effect that simulates the feeling of moving through space, enhanced by the enemy sprites that grow in size as they approach the player. In terms of gameplay, *Space Firebird* stands out by allowing the player's ship to scroll in an arc rather than across a level field and by giving the player a bonus attack that raises the ship's force shield allowing it to charge upwards and destroy any enemies in its path.



**CHANCE OF RESURRECTION:**



SCORE: 71%

## CONTEMPORARY COIN-OPS

### MARIO KART ARCADE GP

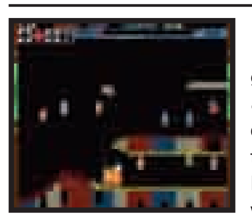


**WHILE several TRIFORCE games were produced in the three years after *F-Zero AX*, it wasn't till 2005 that another Nintendo title returned to the big screen. Namco was permitted to produce *Mario Kart Arcade GP*, and the cabinet brought such features as an built-in camera to display the player's face, and a selection of over 50 unique weapons, plus the ability to play as Namco's *Pac-Man* characters. *Mario Kart* fans welcomed the return to traditional *MK* values after the hit-and-miss *Double Dash!!*, but charging a pound to advance to the next race left most players feeling ripped off.**

# Sky Skipper

SCORE: 93%

**YEAR:** 1981 **PLAYERS:** 2 **CONVERTED TO:** Atari 2600



**If there's one unknown gem from Nintendo's past that deserves a glorious comeback it is most definitely *Sky Skipper*.** Quite why this was only ever converted to one console is a mystery to us because we guarantee that if it had appeared on the NES then everyone would remember it as fondly as *Donkey Kong* and *Mario Bros*. Like all the best Nintendo games, *Sky Skipper* combines a typically wacky concept with solid, highly polished gameplay. The game's concept is simple yet undeniably insane: pilot an aeroplane around a castle, dropping bombs on giant gorillas to open cages, and rescuing the animals and people from within. For some reason the captives all match up to the suits of playing cards. And we still have no idea why.

Piloting the plane is great fun; flying downwards will increase speed but also increase the risk of crashing when running through the tunnels below the castle. Flying through a cloud will confuse the young pilot and cause him to momentarily lose control of the plane. Further risk is added by the gorillas that lob rocks into the sky in the hope of knocking the plane to the ground. On top of all this, the player must also monitor how much fuel they have used and land back at base to fill up if necessary, although refraining from doing so will earn big bonus points at the level's end. *Sky Skipper* has fantastic gameplay, a clever scoring system and oodles of classic Nintendo charm. The campaign for a re-release or remake starts here…

**CHANCE OF RESURRECTION:** 6/10




▲ Quite why Mr You isn't as famous as Mario, we'll never know.

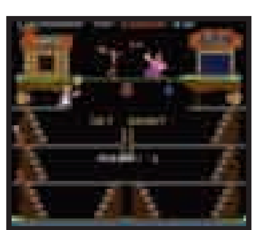
▲ Several NES games made their way to the arcade via the Playchoice 10 and VS cabinets.

◄ Imagine what the world would be like if this game never existed.

# Popeye

SCORE: 90%

**YEAR:** 1982 **PLAYERS:** 2 **CONVERTED TO:** Atari 2600, 5200 and 800, Commodore 64, Colecovision, Odyssey 2, Intellivision, NES



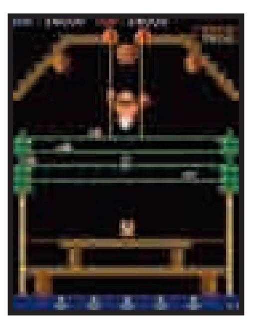
**There's a good reason why Popeye was converted to so many other formats back in the early-Eighties: it's brilliant.** The aim is to collect the intangibles that Olive Oyl drops from above (love hearts, musical notes and, oddly, cries for help) while avoiding Bluto and other level-specific baddies such as vultures or old crones that like to throw glass bottles at our hero. Popeye himself doesn't have any standard attacks as such, but there are a couple of items that can help him out. Each level contains a can of spinach (of course) that enables the sailor-man to hit Bluto so hard that he bounces around the screen. In addition, some levels contain traps like the first level's bucket, which can be dropped over Bluto's head.

*Popeye* is a fun, charismatic platform game that's almost as good as *Donkey Kong* itself, and although the game was ported to plenty of systems between 1982 and 1985 it is highly unlikely that we'll ever see this excellent arcade game on any a console again. Nintendo hasn't produced a *Popeye* game in over a decade so we suspect that it no longer has the videogame rights, and any re-release or remake would only be possible if it paid the current copyright holders a lot of money. Not. Going. To. Happen.

**CHANCE OF RESURRECTION:** 1/10

# Donkey Kong 3

**YEAR:** 1983 **PLAYERS:** 2 **CONVERTED TO:** NES, GBA (e-reader), MSX, NEC PC 8801



**Everyone knows *Donkey Kong* and its sequel *Donkey Kong Jr*, but few have heard of the third in the series.** *Donkey Kong 3* is the red-headed stepchild of the *DK* arcade family as it bears little relation to the previous two. It's more a shoot-'em-up than a platformer, and Mario is nowhere to be seen. Instead, the player takes control of Stanley the Bugman whose greenhouse has been invaded by Kong who has released creepy crawlies to eat Stanley's flowers. Armed only with bug spray, Stanley must protect his flowers and spray Kong until he retreats.

*DK3* plays quite well, but was poorly received in 1983 as it deviated too far from the original. Nintendo seemed to have faith in the game and quickly ported it to NES while also granting Hudsonsoft the rights to produce MSX and PC 88 versions with all-new levels. *Donkey Kong* is enjoying a renaissance right now so we wouldn't be surprised if this made a comeback.

**CHANCE OF RESURRECTION:** 8/10





# Arm Wrestling

SCORE: 94%

**YEAR:** 1985 **PLAYERS:** 1 **CONVERTED TO:** Arcade Only



**Of all Nintendo's classic arcade games, *Arm Wrestling* is the one that is most often requested for the remake treatment by those in the know.** The coin-op was made by the same team behind *Punch-Out!!* and ran on a machine that used two monitors stacked vertically. Six opponents had to be arm-wrestled by tapping the joystick to the left and hitting right when he or she showed signs of struggling, to gain the advantage. The increasingly crazy characters became much harder to defeat as the game progressed, with much more than good arm-wrestling skills needed to win the match. The third opponent, Mask X, for example, could only be defeated if the player tapped the stick upwards at the last minute to unmask the wrestler. Doing so would reveal that underneath the mask was Bald Bull from *Punch-Out!!*.

Although *Arm Wrestling* used exactly the same cabinets as the original *Punch-Out!!* coin-op it didn't receive nearly as much attention as its predecessor and was never converted to a home videogame system. This is surely a crime against gamers everywhere as *Arm Wrestling* has just as much humour and pure fun as Nintendo's boxing game. The double-screen features would make this perfect for a DS remake – the ref throws a bag of money from the top screen to the player at the bottom, at several points – but we'd be happy to see it appear on any console… as long as it's just as much fun.

**CHANCE OF RESURRECTION:**



# Mario Roulette




**YEAR:** 1991 **PLAYERS:** 2 **CONVERTED TO:** Arcade Only



**Okay, so we're cheating a teeny tiny bit with this one as it's not strictly a videogame and wasn't even developed by Nintendo.** It's debatable whether video-poker-style machines can be counted as videogames, but when one of those machines features a heavy *Super Mario World* theme we reckon we can just about squeeze it in. This particular machine was developed by Konami and uses only one button to randomly pick from a choice of nine playing cards featuring familiar *Mario* items. Get a certain number of the same item and the machine will reward your 'skill' with a massive pay-off.

What's most strange about *Mario Roulette* isn't that it was made by Konami, or that it isn't actually a roulette game at all, but rather it's the fact that Nintendo actually endorsed a gambling game to begin with. Back in 1991, Nintendo was notorious for going out of its way to disassociate itself and its games from any adult pastimes, and so it was shocking to see a Mario-themed gambling game at the time. Nintendo of America was always more concerned with maintaining a family-friendly image though, so we completely understand why this machine never made it out of Japan.

**CHANCE OF RESURRECTION:**

## CONTEMPORARY COIN-OPS

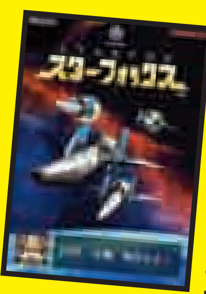
### DONKEY KONG JUNGLE FEVER



**CONTINUING NINTENDO'S RECENT** trend of licensing out its franchises to other developers, 2005 saw Capcom bring *Donkey Kong* back to the arcade after a 22-year absence. *Jungle Fever* was only released in Japan, and detailed information is almost non-existent, but as far as we can tell it is another gambling game that's similar to the *Pac-Man* coin-waterfall games that have appeared in some British seaside arcades. From what we can make out, the game plays out on a small screen within the cabinet, and is directly affected by the movement of the coins as they drop through the machine. Knowing Capcom and Nintendo however, we're sure there's much more to it than this – if only we could find a cabinet to double check.

## CONTEMPORARY COIN-OPS

### STAR FOX ARMADA (CANCELLED)



**BACK WHEN THE** Triforce system was announced, Nintendo showed a teaser poster for *Star Fox Armada*: a Namco-developed *Star Fox* game that seemed destined for both the Arcade and GameCube with Internet link-up play between the two, heavily rumoured. It was never to be though; as *Armada's* development struggled on, it was eventually released as *Star Fox Assault* on the GameCube, the arcade version never to be mentioned again.

# CLASH OF THE TITANS

# DOUBLE DRAGON

As gaming infiltrated the home market, a new breed of gamer evolved. Dubbed the 'fanboy', he associated himself with a certain genre or machine, or even developer or publisher, and then ridiculed all who opposed him. First recorded in playgrounds in the early-Eighties, typical arguments revolved around who had the better machine, or which game looked best on which format. We aim to put a stop to years of squabbling by finding the definitive versions of some classic titles. This month: the 8-bit handheld versions of Technos' *Double Dragon*.

## ROUND 1: VISUALS

**GAME GEAR:** Although Virgin Interactive's handheld conversion of *Double Dragon* bears little resemblance to the arcade original, we're prepared to let it off simply because it looks so stunning. The re-drawn sprites and backgrounds are highly detailed and the animation is striking. This almost looks like a Mega Drive game.

**GAME BOY:** The Game Boy edition of the game was developed by Technos itself and retains the developer's signature look as well as a close approximation of the original level design. The sprite work is full of character and the relatively strong animation is let down only by a little sprite flicker when characters overlap.

**LYNX:** Technos' other handheld *DD* also retains the trademark character designs that, while initially impressive, suffer a zoomed-in view that does the game no favours. The detailed backgrounds of the other two versions are nowhere to be seen, and the camera is forced to pan up and down far too much.

**WINNER: GAME GEAR**
**RUNNER UP: GAME BOY**

## ROUND 2: AUDIO

**GAME GEAR:** Very much in keeping with its excellent visuals, the Game Gear version of *Double Dragon* offers a brilliant theme tune with several layers of atmospheric depth. Unlike its contemporaries, the tune never gets old and actually complements the gameplay as well as being a joy to listen to.

**GAME BOY:** Although there have certainly been far worse tunes played through the Game Boy's speakers over the years, the main theme to *Double Dragon* loops far too often and soon becomes very tedious after a couple of repetitions. If we were on the bus we wouldn't bother plugging in the headphones to listen to this.

**LYNX:** Though the music for the Lynx version is much more tolerable than that on the Game Boy, Atari is let down by Technos' bizarre decision to remove almost all of the sound effects. Consequently, each scrap feels weightless in a way that makes the entire game feel flat and uninspiring.

**WINNER: GAME GEAR**
**RUNNER UP: GAME BOY**

## ROUND 3: GAMEPLAY

**GAME GEAR:** Last month's Clash Of The Titans saw the Game Gear excel in the graphics and sound department but sadly fall at the last hurdle – happily that's not the case here. *Double Dragon* plays like a dream, largely thanks to the surprisingly large repertoire of moves including a rather handy dash attack that keeps the action moving along nicely.

**GAME BOY:** Despite the issue of some horrendous sprite flicker, the Game Boy *Double Dragon* plays pretty well and is certainly worth digging out the old handheld for. Each fight carries the same impact as the arcade version, aside from the boss battles which unfortunately suffer from poor collision detection.

**LYNX:** Oh dear. It seems the Lynx just can't do anything right this month as its conversion falls flat on its face for the third and final time. Horribly unresponsive controls, cripplingly slow reaction times and a camera that just won't stay still make this almost unplayable.

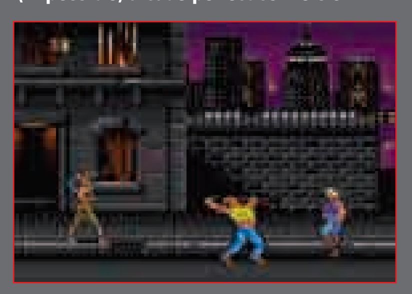
**WINNER: GAME GEAR**
**RUNNER UP: GAME BOY**

## AND THE WINNER IS...



### GAME GEAR

It may be inspired by the original arcade game, but Virgin's interpretation of *Double Dragon* is one of the best side-scrolling fighters we've played on Sega's underrated handheld, which goes to show that playing to the strengths of the hardware is much more important than striving for an (impossible) arcade-perfect conversion.



A great game, made even better. Highly recommended.




Let down by a couple of flaws, but still pretty solid.






# GAMES THAT TIME FORGOT

**WE ATTEMPT TO REWRITE THE HISTORY BOOKS BY SALUTING THOSE CLASSIC GAMES THAT HAVE FALLEN BY THE WAYSIDE**





▲ Stealth gameplay before *Metal Gear Solid*? Say it ain't so…

**Release:** 1996
**Format:** Amiga
**Publisher:** Warner Interactive
**Developer:** The Bitmap Brothers

## THE CHAOS ENGINE 2

### SPLITTING UP IS HARD TO DO…

When The Bitmap Brothers originally announced that they were working on a sequel to *The Chaos Engine*, Amiga gamers thanked their lucky stars since the original was generally regarded as one of the finest run-and-gun games of all time. Unfortunately for those fans, the game hit several delays that set the release back to late 1996 by which time the Amiga had been killed off by PlayStation, Windows 95 and of course the death of Commodore itself.

Few people eventually picked up *The Chaos Engine 2* and those who did were surprised by what they found. The Bitmaps had controversially decided to abandon the popular formula of the first game in favour of a split-screen maze game, in which players competed to earn more points than each other by killing as many enemies as possible and completing specific tasks. The redesign was a brave move that didn't sit well with most people because of the way the computer-controlled opponents had a ridiculously unfair advantage that saw them win almost every time. The game was despised by solo players, but those who sampled the two-player game found an involving, well-balanced experience that far outshone the single-player mode.

# WORST LICENCE EVER

**Release:** 1978
**Format:** Atari 2600
**Publisher:** Atari
**Developer:** In-House

## SUPERMAN

### YOU WON'T BELIEVE A MAN CAN FLY

Even if EA's upcoming movie-based *Superman* game turns out to be a terrible piece of work, it will still be a thousand times better than this unfathomably poor 2600 game. Released in 1978, to coincide with the Christopher Reeve film of the same name, Atari's *Superman* was far too ambitious for the woefully underpowered console and played about as well as a football match on an escalator.

The game starts off fairly well: as Clark Kent, you walk the streets of Metropolis until a gang of jet-pack wearing criminals destroy a bridge. To get across, you have to backtrack to the first screen and use the phone box to change into Superman then fly across the gap and thwart the bad guys. After this, the game falls completely to pieces. With Superman able to explore Metropolis at will and carry most sprites – including Lois Lane – it's clear that the game was based on Atari's classic adventure. The map is so confusingly laid out and poorly drawn though, that exploration becomes almost impossible and the whole point of the game soon evaporates. Add in some annoyingly flickery sprites and poor collision detection and *Superman* becomes a game that could have been great, but ultimately failed even to be average.



▲ There are actually four sprites here, but they flickered too much for the screenshot.




# SMASH TV

## BEHIND THE SCENES

Retro Feature

**WILLIAMS' ROBOTRON 2084 IS UNDOUBTEDLY ONE OF THE GREATEST GAMES OF ALL TIME. SO, WITH SUCH A HIGH STANDARD TO LIVE UP TO, HOW DID EUGENE JARVIS CREATE A SEQUEL THAT MANAGED TO BE EQUALLY AS WELL LOVED?**



A youthful Jarvis promoting the awesome *NARC* in 1988.

**The answer is simple. *Smash TV* captured the spirit of the times perfectly.** Where *Robotron* had defined the mood of the Eighties by distilling twitch gaming to its purest form in order to ride the wave of score-attack shooters that were the bread and butter of the arcade scene back then, *Smash TV* took the tried-and-tested twin-joystick play mechanic and wrapped it in a distinctly early-Nineties shroud. This meant using advanced graphical technologies to fill the screen with as much gore as possible – a trend Williams itself had set with the exploding body parts of *NARC*, and would go on to master through the Fatalities of *Mortal Kombat*. The game also called upon popular movie references, most notably *Running Man*, to maximise its appeal to that decade's teenage gamers. With an almost clinically addictive gameplay mechanic and a graphical theme designed to lure in the millions of testosterone-fuelled boys around the world, there was no way *Smash TV* could fail. Yet, as Eugene Jarvis recently revealed to us, the game's transition to the coin-op screen was far from assured.

"The game was the result of a collaboration between Mark Turmell (*NBA Jam*, *NFL Blitz*, *NBA Ballers*, *Sneakers*), John Tobias (*Mortal Kombat*) and myself. Mark was a big *Robotron* fan, especially of the dual-joystick play mechanic and he inspired us to do some kind of sequel," reveals Jarvis who is first to admit that making a sequel to

**Released:** 1990
**Format:** Arcade
**Publisher:** Williams/Midway
**Developer:** In-House

## TESTING TIMES

UNLIKE THE EXPENSIVE game development industry of today, early arcade designers didn't have huge 'quality assurance' departments to ensure that their games were up to scratch. "It's hard to imagine today, but back in the Eighties at Williams/Bally/Midway there were no play testers; it was the team that played the game – especially the sound guys who seemed to have a lot of time on their hands. I was at the Game Developers Conference on a lecture about game development, and the speaker said the key to his team's success was actually making the development team play the game. The industry is so specialised today with testers and overtaxed developers, that often the development team never plays the game. This is why a lot of games are crap; the chefs don't eat their own cooking. So we would play the game a lot in-house to catch most of the bugs, but the really bizarre bugs were found in the field test. So our testers were really paying arcade players."

## SMASH PSP

SMASH TV MAY have been a semi-sequel to *Robotron*, but the 1990 coin-op has since inspired many more games than its spiritual predecessor. Despite receiving a minor console 'upgrade' in the form of *Super Smash TV*, the next chapter in the series is widely regarded as the 1991 arcade game, *Total Carnage*. Also by Midway, it used the same great twin-stick controls, but instead of taking place in confined arenas, it plunged you into a vertically scrolling shooter more like *Mercs* than anything.

Like *Smash TV*, the game was two-player co-operatiive and featured an element of political satire. Instead of being set in an American future however, the satire was much closer to home as the documentation in *Midway Arcade Treasures* reveals that it was intended as a parody of the first *Gulf War* and that the main villain was a caricature of Saddam Hussein. The tale of *Smash TV's* heritage doesn't end there however, the 2005 PSP game *GTA: Liberty City Stories* features a side-quest called 'Slash TV' in which the protagonist must kill several waves of enemy. The camera even pulls back from the over-the-shoulder view to a top-down perspective more akin to Midway's original arcade game.

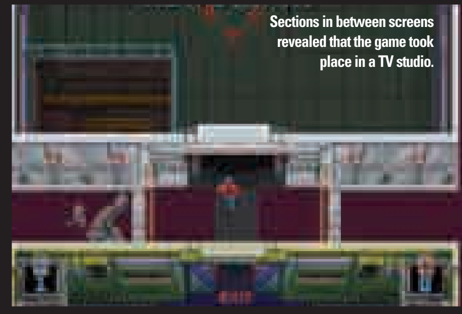




Winning a VCR was one vision of the future that didn't prove to be true.




No prizes for guessing where Jarvis got the title of *Smash TV's* sequel.



Sections in between screens revealed that the game took place in a TV studio.

*Robotron* was a most daunting prospect and that a "spin-off" was a much more desirable approach. "There are really two reasons a sequel is made for a game: first, for strictly commercial reasons, and second, because the designers had more stuff they wanted to explore, or improve on the original. *Robotron* had such amazing gameplay that, like *Tetris*, it was not obvious how to improve it. And since *Robotron* was made shortly before the videogame crash, a commercial sequel was not explored at the time. The other problem was that players never tired of the original." The decision was made to retain the key elements of *Robotron's* gameplay, adding new features to bring it up to date. "The wave-based game continued to be the main genre in the arcades. *Smash TV* added in the boss monsters and the ability to continue a game, which were the dominant play elements of its later era. It was all designed to separate players from their quarters."

Hardened *Smash TV* players will agree that the boss monsters represented the real standout moments of the arcade game. These screen-filling, bio-mechanical monstrosities instantly sent the player's adrenaline sky-high and elevated *Smash TV* from a compulsive shooter to a memorable experience that compelled the player to return to the game just to see what grotesque creation they had missed before. Where did these imaginative bosses come from? "The bosses were a great collaboration between Turmell, Tobias, me, Tim Coman and the rest of the team. Tobias created the art, pixel by pixel, doing all the 3D rotations and rendering in his head.

It was an unbelievable feat that no one would attempt today with all the 3D-MAX and Maya art packages out there. Turmell and I handled the heavy coding, and the team just tried to envision our worst nightmares. The flatface guy was obviously inspired by *Sinistar*, the Cobra is some kind of *Indiana-Jones*-type deal gone wrong, and Mutoid Man was kind of like the tanks from *Robotron*, *Terminator*, and some twisted Tim Burton nightmare. Only at the end of the project did we come up with the idea of the Host subbing for Mutoid Man – we had to crank out another boss in a hurry – the underwear thing was pure Tobias genius."

Coming up with a concept that remained faithful to *Robotron* while also heading in a bold, new direction had proved a tricky yet manageable feat of videogame design, but Jarvis and co weren't out of the woods. *Smash TV* was to be developed by a mostly new team of coders – many of whom hadn't made a commercial game before – which led to a couple of unique problems for the senior design staff. "We had a lot of start-up problems on the game," recalls Jarvis. "A big problem we had was that the team had a lot of new members and breaking in the new coders was time consuming. Also, this was Mark's first coin-op project, and John Tobias' first videogame. It was tough getting up to speed for the new guys. We hired this one new programmer, Robby Ashworth, and he was just getting nowhere with the enemy coding after several months. So Mark sat down with him and realised that he couldn't see his screen. Mark took him down to the eye doctor

**"TOBIAS CREATED THE ART – DOING ALL THE 3D ROTATIONS AND RENDERING IN HIS HEAD – IT WAS AN UNBELIEVABLE FEAT"**

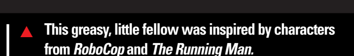
## "THE ORIGINAL RELEASE HAD NO PLEASURE DOMES. IT WAS A TOTAL SCAM TO KEEP PLAYERS GOING FOR SOME IMPOSSIBLE GOAL"

and bought him some glasses, and his coding proficiency skyrocketed."

Another major problem was that the 15-month development time simply wasn't long enough to fit in everything that they intended. As a consequence *Smash TV*'s fabled hidden Pleasure Domes became the stuff of legend and frustration for many dedicated players. "The truth is we ran out of time and had to ship the game, and so the domes never got done," reveals Jarvis, "but anything we actually did would have been a disappointment so it turned out to be pure genius." Jarvis continues, "The original coin-op release had no Pleasure Domes. It was a total scam to keep players going for some impossible goal. The keys didn't do anything. People would call up and ask how to get into the Pleasure Domes and we would ask them how many keys they picked up and where, and then we'd say they need to get such and such key in a certain room, as well as other things we couldn't tell them. The players searched for months. Finally, liars started posting on the Internet that they had found the Pleasure Domes – which was impossible – but it just egged on the other players. After about six months, management somehow figured out it was a scam, and we had to go back and do a new release with the Pleasure Domes in it."

Just like every other arcade game of the period, as *Smash TV* approached completion it was sent into location test around selected arcades in America to gauge its potential revenue. "Probably the craziest thing," remembers Jarvis, "was when we first put the game out on test at Times Square Arcade on Broadway in Chicago, I think it is a gay disco now. Anyway, we had only done the first three waves in the game and we were doing an early test, so we set the game up and the players mobbed it right away. A couple of really tough-looking guys got into the third wave which never ended – basically played forever – and we didn't want to be around when the players figured out there was no fourth wave after putting 20 bucks in the machine, so we split for some pizza. We get back to the arcade about an hour later, and the same two guys are still in wave three. It was crazy – they were playing in an adrenaline frenzy. Then the game crashes. The screen freezes, and all the colours go psychedelic. The players look at each other in frustration. The game resets, and those guys stuck in another ten bucks and started playing again. At that point we knew the game was good."

Eugene Jarvis has made as many influential games as Miyamoto, and we love him for it.



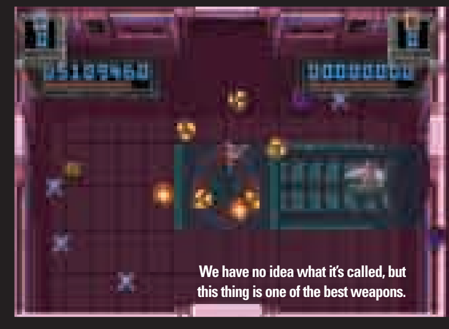
▲ This greasy, little fellow was inspired by characters from *RoboCop* and *The Running Man*.

As development continued on *Smash TV* it was tested further and it became increasingly clear to Jarvis that his game was destined for success. "It rocked," exclaims the veteran developer when we ask how gamers reacted to the finished game. "People would walk up and dump 50 coins into the game for starters. It was amazingly addictive and funny. The effects were awesome, from Mutoid Man's blood-boil decapitation to player death by mine where your eyeball and other bits and pieces flew up to the camera. The players loved the intense action and massive depth. The co-op gameplay was also fun although there were big bragging rights at bonus time for the points leader, which added a competitive element to the mix."

One particular element that appealed to gamers was the diverse range of collectable weapons that allowed for ever more exaggerated means of destruction. "The genius of the weapons system was the power-up concept and the proper percentaging and placement of the power-ups. The system was the brainchild of Mark Turmell. We incorporated some of the funniest elements of past games, such as the smart bomb of *Defender*, the firepower of the power-up ships in *Galaga* and *Xevious*-style games, as well as some gory crowd pleasers like the saw blades. The genius of the system was the result of massive play testing and balancing by the team."

Finally, as the group had obviously anticipated, the many references to movies of the late-Eighties struck a chord with arcade goers of 1990. "The black guy/white guy team thing was a big deal back in the Eighties with *Miami Vice*, *Die Hard*, and other action line-ups. We had also done it in *NARC* – our previous release – and we found it was very cool to be the black guy," comments Jarvis on one of many movie parallels in the game. "The twisted MC was a combination of *RoboCop* and *Running Man*'s announcer. To this day *RoboCop* is my favourite movie".

Jarvis closes the interview by musing on the possibilities of an update to the *Smash TV* franchise. "You'd go full 3D, maybe with both third-person view and full, immersive first-person viewpoint. You'd flesh out the story even more: more action, more blood, more T and A, more everything. *Dead Or Alive Beach Volleyball* meets *Mortal Kombat*…" And while the prospect of a gore-filled flesh-fest might amuse the great developer, we're confident that the continued appearance of *Smash TV* on retro compilations and on Live Arcade shows that Jarvis' early-Nineties design is still popular enough to keep such 3D remakes the stuff of imagination for a few more years at least.




We have no idea what it's called, but this thing is one of the best weapons.

# THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION




**38-YEAR-OLD GREG MOTT IS UNIQUE AMONG GAMES™'S ULTIMATE COLLECTORS BECAUSE HE DOESN'T OWN A SINGLE CONSOLE, COMPUTER OR HANDHELD. THE FINANCIAL CONTROLLER FROM POOLE IN DORSET ONLY HAS EYES FOR CLASSIC ARCADE CABINETS AND HAS ACCUMULATED A COLLECTION OF SOME OF THE FINEST COIN-OPS KNOWN TO MAN…**



▼ If games™ had a *Robotron* cab in the office then we'd probably be grinning too.

**games™: So Greg, how did your interest in videogames begin?**

**Greg Mott:** The first machine that really got me into videogames was *Galaxian*. When I was really young I used to go to arcades before the videogame era, and played roulette, horse racing and Cromptons fruit games. Initially, I only saw *Space Invaders* machines with buttons and couldn't get the hang of them; I only really got into games when I tried a *Galaxian* with a joystick.

**g™: How long have you been collecting arcade cabinets?**

**GM:** The first cab I bought was *Joust* for £150 from a local arcade at Ryde on the Island in 1992. The idea for collecting came when I was sitting in a pub, reminiscing with a mate about the days we use to spend in the arcades, and thought 'wouldn't it be cool to own some machines' – our dream when we were young. Then I thought 'why not?' The rest is history.

**g™: How many machines do you own?**

**GM:** 18 dedicated videos – *Robotron*, *Defender*, *Joust*, *Pac-Man*, *Space Duel*, *Black Widow*, *Tempest*, *Star Wars*, *Centipede*, *Millipede*, *Galaxian*, *Time Pilot*, *Gorf*, *Berzerk*, *Warlords Cocktail*, *Toobin*, *Bomber* and *Space Invaders II* and a mame cab.

**g™: Which is your favourite arcade game?**

**GM:** It has to be *Robotron*, although if you'd asked me in the early-Eighties I'd have said *Defender*. In my view, *Robotron* is the most intense gaming experience. The control movement with the two joysticks is so easy it soon becomes intuitive. Also, with the constant fire, you don't have to worry about pressing the fire button – you can just concentrate on zapping those robots. Even though sometimes you seem to be surrounded, you can pull off some amazing escapes as there is always a way out, it's just a matter of finding it. Like most of the classics, I like the way that the gameplay doesn't change but just gets harder with each wave. In fact, it gets hard pretty quickly and always presents a challenge leaving you wanting to have just one more game. I sometimes put it on Level 10 – that can get pretty hectic.



**g™: What's your most prized possession and why?**

**GM:** *Robotron* again. When it first came out I was never that interested – it wasn't until I was at university in the mid-Eighties that I really got into it. Since then it was the one I wanted, and throughout my tour of the country's arcades in the early-Nineties I saw only one. Unfortunately, I didn't get that and it wasn't until ten years after I started collecting that I was finally able to get my hands on one from fellow collector and *Robotron* expert, Dave Langley.

**g™: What game is missing from your collection?**

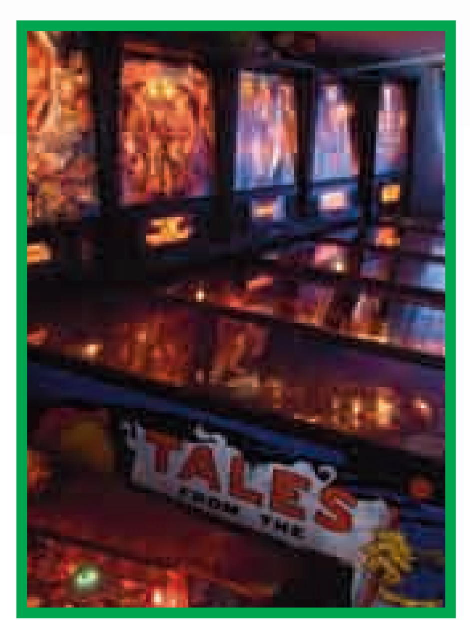
**GM:** Until a couple of months ago I would have said *Warlords Cocktail*, but, thanks to Andy Welburn, that's now proudly sitting in the garage. I'm fortunate that I have all the machines I was desperately looking for. In any case, like many collectors, I've run out of space. If I were to get another machine, it would likely be a pinball rather than a video.

**g™: Any idea how much you've spent on cabinets?**

**GM:** I was lucky to start collecting before a lot of








Greg also has a healthy collection of pinball tables. Don't fancy paying his leccie bills much…



others so I was able to get most of my cabs pretty cheaply in the early-Nineties (£40-£150). Since then the others have cost between £500 and £1,000 excluding pins, where the most I've paid is £1,600. All told I've probably spent the best part of £10,000 on videogames and getting towards a similar amount on pins.

**g™: Do you play all of your games?**

**GM:** I tend to play a few evenings a week and at weekends, but I don't get to play as often as I'd like. I tend to concentrate on one or two games at a time, so I go through phases where I'll play one or two for a few weeks and then not that much for a while. The games getting the most play recently have been *Warlords* and *Pac-Man*. Out of all my machines, I've probably played *Robotron* as much as all the others put together and it's one that never goes un-played for long. Until a year ago, many of the machines weren't working, but I've since had them fixed and now almost have too much choice – there's just not enough time.

**g™: How do you make space for all your cabs?**

**GM:** Well, I was pretty lucky in that I got the cabs installed in the house before I met my wife, so it's more difficult for her to oust them now they're in situ. I also have two garages that I've converted, so most of the cabs are actually in there. I've tried to make them feel like they're part of the house with ceilings and carpet.

**g™: What do your friends and family think?**

**GM:** My wife Fiona is very understanding and tolerant (she might be reading this), but I think she was a bit shocked when I first showed her the collection. She is very supportive about it, but lately she's been pressing to move house so she can have a dining room again. Fiona prefers the pinballs to the videogames, as do most of our visitors actually. My friends mostly aren't into the games at all which is a shame as it's more fun to compete against other people. Still, I got to know a lot of other collectors through the Internet.

**g™: Do you restore the cabs yourself or buy refurbished ones?**

**GM:** I've generally only bought fully working machines – although as most collectors will know, they soon stop working. I'm absolutely useless when it comes to fixing the games, so a fair number of cabinets have been non-workers for a good many years. I've had help from other collectors to fix a few, but last year I was really lucky to find an ex-arcade engineer who has done a fantastic job in getting the rest fully operational. The artwork has always been an aspect which has appealed to me, so I have done some restoration by cleaning the sides and replacing control panels and side art with reproductions purchased from the States.

**g™: As an arcade collector, what is your personal opinion of MAME?**

**GM:** I think it's absolutely fantastic. Barring a couple of exceptions, it's difficult to tell the difference between the originals and a Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator. It's also really convenient to have all of the games on one machine. Excluding titles where you obviously need specific controls, like *Star Wars*, you have a whole arcade on one machine. Otherwise I'd be wanting some other cabinets or PCBs at least. I'd highly recommend a MAME cab for anyone with limited space.

**g™: We're surprised you don't own any retro consoles. Why is this?**

**GM:** I suppose it might be through growing up with the arcades, and consoles never reaching the quality of the arcade games of the time. I did have a Spectrum in the Eighties, which was fun back then, but I really wanted an arcade cab and nothing the consoles could provide could even come close. Of course, everything's changed now with the quality of console games, but my first and true love will always be the classic arcade games.



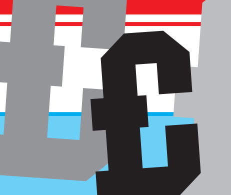
Forget the *Pac-Man* toys, that *Black Widow* cabinet is the stuff of dreams.

Aha, we have a *Star Wars* cab in the office. Take that, Greg.









# BUYERS' GUIDE

**It might be easy to play retro games through emulation, but there's nothing quite like owning the original system – that musty smell of ancient electronics can never really be replicated with a PC. Of course, there's always a price to pay and unscrupulous dealers out to make a quick buck, but you really don't have to pay through the nose if you look in the right places. Charity shops, car boot sales and eBay are all good places to start, but before you do, use our guide to see how much you should be paying…**

## 3DO

| | |
|---|---|
| Panasonic 3DO | £40-£60 |
| Goldstar 3DO | £45-£60 |

## ACORN COMPUTERS

| | |
|---|---|
| BBC Micro | £15-£25 |
| Acorn Electron | £10-£25 |

## AMSTRAD

| | |
|---|---|
| Amstrad CPC 464 | £10-£25 |
| Amstrad CPC 664 | £20-£25 |
| Amstrad CPC 6128 | £25-£50 |
| Amstrad GX4000 | £20-£60 |



## ATARI

| | |
|---|---|
| Atari VCS 2600 | £20-£35 |
| Atari ST | £20+ (depending on model) |
| Atari Lynx | £15+ (depending on model) |
| Atari Jaguar | £20 |

## COMMODORE

| | |
|---|---|
| Commodore Vic20 | £10-£30 |
| Commodore 64 | £10-£30 |
| Commodore Amiga | £20+ (depending on model) |
| Commodore CDTV | £20-£50 |
| C64 GS | £30-£50 |
| Commodore CD32 | £25-£50 |

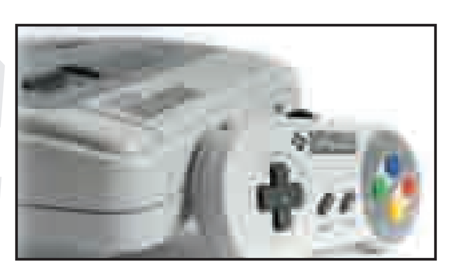


## MISC

| | |
|---|---|
| GCE Vectrex (General Consumer Electronics) | £60-£200 |
| MB Vectrex (Milton Bradley) | £150-£200 |
| JAMMA Compatible cabinets | £100-£350 (depending on model) |
| Super Gun | £120-£400 (depending on model) |

## NEC

| | |
|---|---|
| PC Engine | £55-£70 |
| Turbo Grafx-16 | £30-£50 |
| Turbo Duo | £120-£180 |
| PC Engine GT | £70-£150 |
| Super Grafx | £80 (prices can fluctuate) |



## NINTENDO

| | |
|---|---|
| Game & Watch | £1-£200 (depending on model) |
| Nintendo Entertainment System | £15-£20 |
| Game Boy/Game Boy Pocket | £5-£10 |
| Game Boy Color | £10-£15 |
| Super Nintendo | £20-£40 |
| Virtual Boy | £80-£100 |
| Nintendo 64 | £10-£25 |

## SEGA

| | |
|---|---|
| Master System | £10-£30 (depending on model) |
| Mega Drive | £10-£20 |
| Game Gear | £15-£25 |
| Mega CD | £40-£70 (depending on model) |
| Sega 32X | £35 |
| Sega Nomad | £70-£140 |
| Saturn | £30+ (depending on model) |
| Dreamcast | £25+ (depending on model) |

## SINCLAIR

| | |
|---|---|
| ZX-81 | £40-£70 |
| ZX Spectrum 48K | £20-£50 |
| ZX Spectrum + | £30 |
| ZX Spectrum 128K | £40 |
| ZX Spectrum +2 | £35 |
| ZX SPECTRUM +3 | £40 |

## SNK

| | |
|---|---|
| Neo Geo MVS Single Slot (arcade system) | £70+ (depending on model) |
| Neo Geo AES (home System) | £150+ |
| Neo Geo CD | £100+ |
| Neo Geo CDZ | £80+ |
| Neo Geo Pocket Color | £35 |

**Right then, you've just picked up a second-hand computer and are looking for some classic games to play on it. The only problem is, you're not too sure what to buy. Hopefully we can help. This month we take a look at a selection of comic-based Commodore 64 games…**

## The Amazing Spider-Man

***Estimated Price:*** £1+
***Publisher:*** Paragon Software
***Year of Production:*** 1990

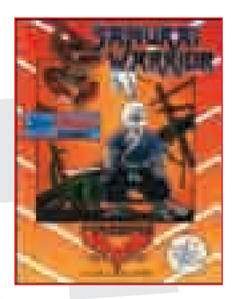
*Spider-Man's* debut on C64 attracted jealous looks from Spectrum and Amstrad owners because of its detailed sprites and excellent animation, but that jealousy soon faded away when they discovered that the game was an absolute dog to play. Too ambitious for its own good, *Spider-Man* allows the player to climb any wall and swing from any surface with a web-line but the controls are fiddly, making Spidey's graceful movements impossible.




## Samurai Warrior

***Estimated Price:*** £2+
***Publisher:*** Firebird
***Year of Production:*** 1988

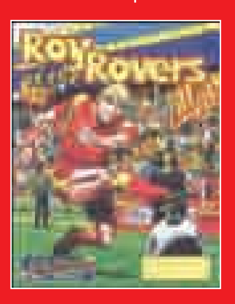
Based on the independent *Usagi Yojimbo* comics by Stan Sakai, *Samurai Warrior* puts you in control of a samurai rabbit. This is one of the best videogames you can get for Commodore 64. This beautiful looking game scrolls from left to right as Usagi engages various ninja and monsters, using a system of sword fighting that works surprisingly well on the limited hardware. And the best bit? Kill a peasant and Usagi will take his own life in shame.



## Roy Of The Rovers

***Estimated Price:*** £1+
***Publisher:*** Gremlin Graphics
***Year of Production:*** 1988

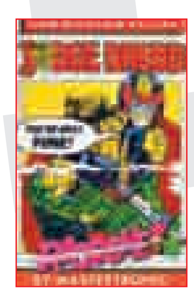
*Roy Of The Rovers* was an ambitious title that attempted to mix the graphic adventure with the football game but unfortunately failed to do either genre the justice it deserved. Starting around 9am, Roy has until 7pm in the evening to find his missing squad in time for the match. Players spend most of the adventure section wondering aimlessly with little to see or do, and the football section is flawed to the point where the goals don't even have posts.




## Judge Dredd

***Estimated Price:*** £1+
***Publisher:*** Mastertronic
***Year of Production:*** 1987

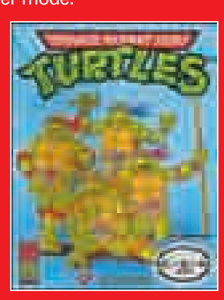
Great music, shame about the game. Judge Dredd was arguably at the height of his popularity in the late-Eighties, and many British comic fans were crying out for a great videogame adaptation. What they were confronted with instead, was a generic platform-shooter with abysmal graphics and poor gameplay that got repetitive from the first push of the fire button. There was a second game – also called *Judge Dredd* – which was just as bad. Avoid both at all costs.



## Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles

***Estimated Price:*** £1+
***Publisher:*** Image Works
***Year of Production:*** 1991

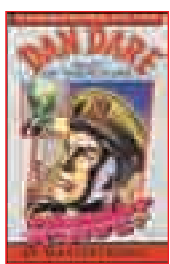
Of the three *Turtles* games on C64, this conversion of the hugely popular Konami arcade game is by far the best. Although the graphics never stood a chance of matching up to the coin-op, they still look pretty good for the humble Commodore and, more importantly, the game plays very well. *TMHT* is one of the better scrolling fighters on C64, let down only by the fact that there is no sign of a two-player mode.




## Dan Dare: Pilot Of The Future

***Estimated Price:*** £1+
***Publisher:*** Mastertronic
***Year of Production:*** 1986

Hailing from the pages of *Eagle* (and later, *2000AD*) *Dan Dare* made a big splash on Commodore 64 with this excellent action-adventure title. The game features some excellent puzzles and a compelling storyline that keeps players hooked right to the end, but what sticks in our mind the most is the excellent graphics. Each screen is presented like a real comic, complete with panels and speech bubbles. Bloody brilliant.




## Questprobe: Featuring Human Torch & The Thing

***Estimated Price:*** £2+
***Publisher:*** Adventure International
***Year of Production:*** 1985

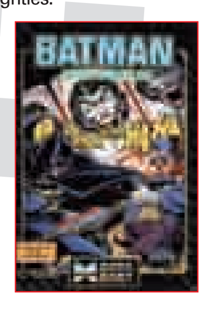
The *Questprobe* series was intended as 12 instalments with a different *Marvel* superhero in each, but the project came to a halt when Adventure International went bust. This version is the third and final of the series, and although it only features half of the Fantastic Four it's a decent game. Many of the puzzles are horribly complicated and illogical, but fans of the comic loved the characterisation and graphics.




## Batman: The Caped Crusader

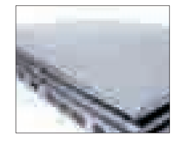
***Estimated Price:*** £1+
***Publisher:*** Ocean
***Year of Production:*** 1988

The first Commodore 64 *Batman* game sees the Caped Crusader embarking on two separate adventures to track down the Penguin and rescue Robin from The Joker. Similar to *Dan Dare,* this is also presented in a comic panel art style. The game was championed by the specialist press of the time for its excellent visuals and story that successfully captured the dark turn that the comics had recently taken in the Eighties.

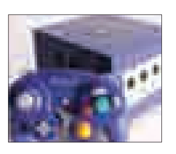
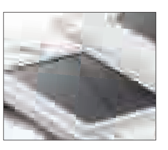


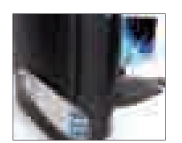
PS2 | PSP | XBOX | XBOX 360 | GAMECUBE | DS | GBA | PC

# ESSENTIALS







**TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE**




## GAME BOY ADVANCE TEN MUST-HAVE GAMES

### 1 ADVANCE WARS 2: BLACK HOLE RISING

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Intelligent Systems
Genre: Turn-Based Strategy
Price: £24.99

**Turn-based strategy and modern warfare aren't the most likely of couples, but Intelligent Systems proved that it could make them perfect bedfellows. Twice. *Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising* layered the simple yet sophisticated formula of *Advance Wars* with even more detail and delivered a stonker of a TBS to Game Boy Advance, unlike anything that had preceded it. Instantly accessible and thoroughly addictive, the foundation of this title was ambrosia for gamers. Play *Black Hole Rising* for more than a few minutes and you won't put it down until you've completed it.**

ISSUE: **8** SCORE: **9**

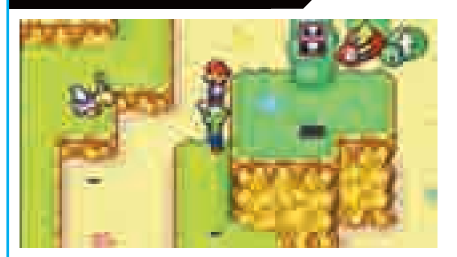






## 2 MARIO & LUIGI: SUPERSTAR SAGA

Publisher: Nintendo Developer: AlphaDream
Genre: Platform Price: £24.99



Nintendo's plumbers paired up for an RPG title with a premise worthy of a chart entry in itself: Princess Peach's voice has been stolen and replaced with explosives. Despite the kooky comedy plot, playing the duo lent a real challenge to this highly original and entertaining game.

ISSUE: **14** SCORE: **9**

## 3 THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE MINISH CAP

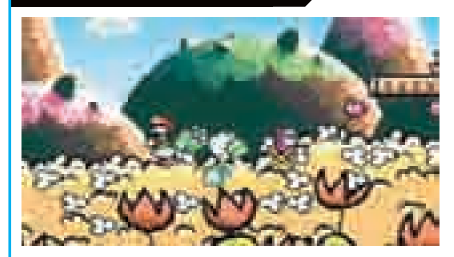
Publisher: Nintendo Developer: In-House
Genre: Role-Playing Game Price: £24.99

Link was shrunk down for Nintendo's final *Zelda* game on its last handheld. Fans saw the microscopic boy go places he could never go before. The limited edition gold SP bundle made this engrossing RPG especially desirable and it sold by the bucket load.

ISSUE: **25** SCORE: **9**

## 4 SUPER MARIO ADVANCE 3: YOSHI'S ISLAND

Publisher: Nintendo Developer: In-House
Genre: Platform Price: £29.99



"Waaa! Waaa! Waaa!" This is the jarring sound that fans of *Yoshi's Island* dreaded. The third *Super Mario Advance* was a highly imaginative platformer that saw Yoshi, the lizard with the extra-long tongue, take the helm and Mario quite literally take a backseat as the helpless infant.

ISSUE: **N/A** SCORE: **8**

## 5 WARIOWARE: TWISTED!

Publisher: Nintendo Developer: In-House
Genre: Party Price: £19.99

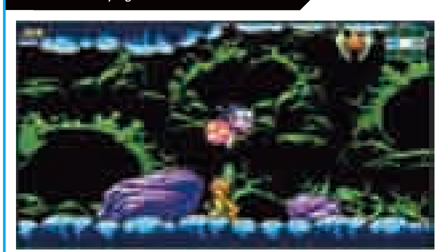


The party-game genre has never been done more justice than with the *WarioWare* series. The GBA version completely ditched the D-pad in favour of tilting the console. Tragically, it was never released in the UK due to laws on the use of a mercury switch in the cart.

ISSUE: **31** SCORE: 8

## 6 METROID: ZERO MISSION

Publisher: Nintendo Developer: In-House
Genre: Role-Playing Game Price: £24.99



This was the second of the popular *Metroid* games to reach GBA. Styled in the fashion of 1994's *Super Metroid*, and based on the original NES version, it fell back on *Metroid*'s classic combination of role-play and sci-fi action. As we had predicted, it was a roaring success.

ISSUE: **17** SCORE: **8**

## 7 STREET FIGHTER ALPHA 3 UPPER

Publisher: Ubisoft Developer: Crawfish
Genre: Beat-'Em-Up Price: £19.99

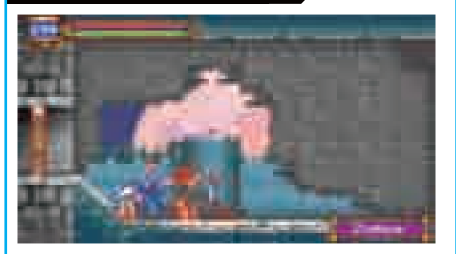


The only 2D beat-'em-up that masses of people still play made it onto the Advance in 2002. Not a great deal had changed from the original SNES and coin-op classic, but the chance to finally play it on the move made *Street Fighter Alpha 3 Upper* a mandatory purchase.

ISSUE: **1** SCORE: **8**

## 8 CASTLEVANIA: ARIA OF SORROW

Publisher: Capcom Developer: In-House
Genre: Platform Price: £24.99

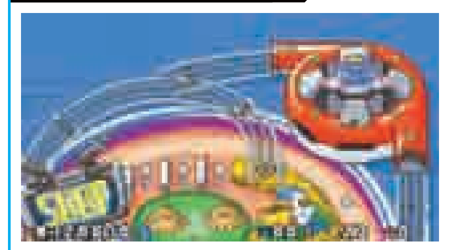


*Aria Of Sorrow* is widely recognised as Konami's best *Castlevania* game since *Symphony Of The Night* on PSOne. Acquiring your defeated enemies' abilities raised the bar for the series. Being a portable rather than home console game just goes to show how good it was.

ISSUE: **6** SCORE: **8**

## 9 POKÉMON PINBALL: RUBY & SAPPHIRE

Publisher: Nintendo Developer: In-House
Genre: Puzzle Price: £19.99



As with the similarities between GBA's *Pokémon* games, *Pokémon Pinball: Ruby & Sapphire* was highly derivative of the original. Still, combining pinball with capturing Pokémon proved an exciting concept and the more lenient difficulty setting opened the game up to younger players.

ISSUE: **11** SCORE: **8**

## 10 MOTHER 3

Publisher: Nintendo Developer: In-House
Genre: RPG Price: ¥4,800



The *Mother* series has acquired a small cult following. *Mother 3* places several lost family members and a pet dog in an alternate America to solve their personal problems and defeat the evil pig men with a rhythm-battle system. Can you follow that? Don't think about it, just play it.

ISSUE: **47** SCORE: **8**

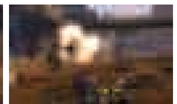
PS2 | PSP | XBOX | XBOX 360 | GAMECUBE | DS | GBA | PC

# ESSENTIALS

**TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-**

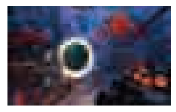
### ODDWORLD: STRANGER'S WRATH

To sabotage any notion of pigeon-holing, the developer made this third sci-fi title in the series both FPS and platform. They gave it optional third and first-person perspectives, but we forgave them because it was sooooo good.

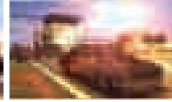
### PREY

Prey was this summer's hit that put a new spin on the FPS genre. There were plenty of mind-bending dimensional quirks, which have been surpassed in concept only by Valve's *Half-Life 2* spin-off in development, *Portal*.



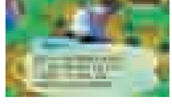
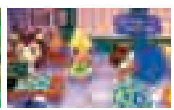

### GTA: LIBERTY CITY STORIES

*GTA* inevitably made it onto PSP in bite-sized portions delivered by *Liberty City Stories*. PSP fans of the series that expected a *San Andreas*-scale game were pleasantly surprised that this cut-down version proved just as entertaining.

### ANIMAL CROSSING

In this *Sims*-style title with an RPG twist and typical Nintendo flair for the wonderfully inane and entertaining, amble around the village acquiring jobs, collecting items and awaiting the exciting special events that occur on holidays.

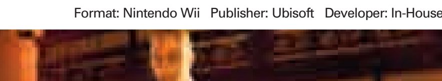
| Title | Publisher | Developer | Issue | Score |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Xbox Ten Must-Have Games** | | | | |
| Battlefield 2: Modern Combat | Electronic Arts | DICE | 38 | 8 |
| Burnout 3 | Electronic Arts | Criterion | 23 | 10 |
| Halo 2 | Microsoft | Bungie | 26 | 9 |
| Jet Set Radio Future | Sega | Smilebit | N/A | 8 |
| Ninja Gaiden Black | Microsoft | Tecmo | 18 | 8 |
| Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath | Electronic Arts | Oddworld Inhabitants | 28 | 9 |
| OutRun 2 | Sega | Sumo Digital | 24 | 8 |
| Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow | Ubisoft | In-House | 22 | 8 |
| Street Fighter Anniversary Collection | Capcom | In-House | N/A | 8 |
| TimeSplitters: Future Perfect | Electronic Arts | Free Radical | 29 | 8 |
| **Xbox 360 Ten Must-Have Games** | | | | |
| Burnout Revenge | Electronic Arts | Criterion | 37 | 9 |
| Call Of Duty 2 | Activision | Infinity Ward | 39 | 8 |
| Dead Rising | Capcom | In-House | 48 | 8 |
| The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion | 2K Games | Bethesda | 43 | 9 |
| Fight Night: Round 3 | Electronic Arts | In-House | 43 | 8 |
| Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter | Ubisoft | In-House | 45 | 9 |
| Hitman: Blood Money | Eidos | IO Interactive | 45 | 8 |
| Prey | 2K Games | Venom Games | 46 | 8 |
| Pro Evolution Soccer 6 | Konami | In-House | 50 | 8 |
| Project Gotham Racing 3 | Microsoft | Bizarre Creations | 39 | 9 |
| **PlayStation Portable Ten Must-Have Games** | | | | |
| Burnout Legends | Electronic Arts | Criterion | 37 | 9 |
| Every Extend Extra | Bandai/Namco Games | Q Entertainment | 49 | 8 |
| Football Manager 2006 | Sega | In-House | N/A | 8 |
| Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories | Rockstar | In-House | 39 | 8 |
| LocoRoco | Sony | In-House | 46 | 9 |
| Lumines | Ubisoft | Q Entertainment | 28 | 8 |
| Mercury | Sony | Awesome Studios | 32 | 8 |
| Power Stone Collection | Capcom | In-House | 49 | 8 |
| Ridge Racer | Sony | Namco | 28 | 8 |
| WipEout Pure | Sony | In-House | 31 | 8 |
| **Nintendo GameCube Ten Must-Have Games** | | | | |
| Alien Hominid | O3 Entertainment | The Behemoth | 27 | 8 |
| Animal Crossing | Nintendo | In-House | 1 | 8 |
| Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem | Nintendo | Silicon Knights | N/A | 8 |
| F-Zero GX | Nintendo | Amusement Vision | 10 | 9 |

## ON THE HORIZON

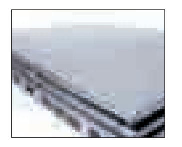
**THEY MAY NOT BE HERE JUST YET, BUT WE FEEL THAT**

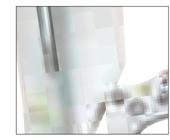
### RED STEEL

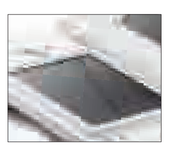
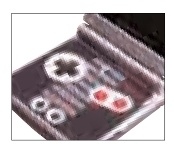
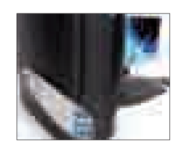
Format: Nintendo Wii Publisher: Ubisoft Developer: In-House




This is one of everyone's hot favourites in Wii's launch line up. Ubisoft is taking full advantage of the Wiimote technology, and the thought of waving Nintendo's Nunchuk around to chop on-screen Yakuza baddies into sushi is an attractive prospect. Forget everything else you know about the game, this is the feature that counts. We don't care how silly we'll look playing *Red Steel* when everyone else in the world is going to be playing it too.



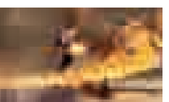




EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ikaruga | Treasure | In-House | 2 | 8 |
| killer7 | Capcom | In-House | 34 | 9 |
| The Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker | Nintendo | In-House | 5 | 9 |
| Metroid Prime | Nintendo | In-House | 2 | 10 |
| Resident Evil 4 | Capcom | In-House | 29 | 9 |
| Viewtiful Joe | Capcom | In-House | 24 | 8 |
| **Playstation2 Ten Must-Have Games** | | | | |
| Amplitude | Sony | Harmonix | 8 | 8 |
| Beyond Good & Evil | Ubisoft | In-House | 12 | 8 |
| Devil May Cry | Capcom | In-House | 30 | 8 |
| Disgaea 2: Cursed Memories | Koei | Nippon Ichi Software | 48 | 9 |
| God Of War | Sony | In-House | 32 | 9 |
| Guitar Hero | RedOctane | Harmonix | 40 | 9 |
| Ico | Sony | In-House | N/A | 9 |
| Rez | Sega | Uga | N/A | 8 |
| Shadow Of The Colossus | Sony | In-House | 39 | 9 |
| Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution | Sega | In-House | 5 | 8 |
| **Nintendo DS Ten Must-Have Games** | | | | |
| Animal Crossing: Wild World | Nintendo | In-House | 40 | 8 |
| Daigasso! Band Brothers | Nintendo | In-House | 29 | 8 |
| Kirby: Power Paintbrush | Nintendo | HAL Labs | 31 | 8 |
| Mario Kart DS | Nintendo | In-House | 39 | 7 |
| Meteos | Nintendo | Q Entertainment | 31 | 9 |
| Ossu Tatakae Ouendan! | Nintendo | Inis | 37 | 8 |
| Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney | Nintendo | Capcom | 23 | 8 |
| StarFox Command | Nintendo | Q-Games | 48 | 8 |
| Trauma Center: Under The Knife | Nintendo | Atlus | 39 | 8 |
| Zoo Keeper | Ignition Entertainment | Success | 30 | 8 |
| **PC Ten Must-Have Games** | | | | |
| Battlefield 2 | Electronic Arts | DICE | 34 | 9 |
| Defcon | Introversion Software | In-House | 49 | 9 |
| Football Manager 2006 | Sega | Sports Interactive | N/A | 9 |
| Grim Fandango | LucasArts | In-House | N/A | 8 |
| Half-Life 2 | Vivendi | Valve Software | N/A | 9 |
| The Movies | Activision | Lionhead Studios | 39 | 9 |
| Naked War | Zee-3 | The Pickford Brothers | 50 | 9 |
| Sam & Max Hit The Road | Activision | LucasArts | N/A | 9 |
| Unreal Tournament 2004 | Atari | Digital Extremes | 18 | 8 |
| World Of Warcraft | Vivendi | Blizzard | 30 | 9 |

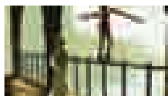
### GOD OF WAR

Lump all the bad-ass PS2 characters into an arena, *Royal Rumble* style, and Kratos will emerge the gore-spattered victor. This is the kind of respect this ruthless one-man war machine will demand. Play *GOW* or you're mincemeat.

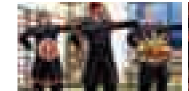
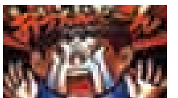
### ICO

A horned boy evades ritual execution in his village by escaping with a princess to a castle. Just like its plot, Sony's seminal RPG sits outside the sphere of 'traditional RPG' and attracted a huge fan base for its spiritual successor, *Shadow Of The Colossus*.

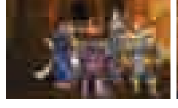
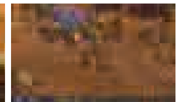
### OSSU TATAKAE OUENDAN!

That's the signal if you have the blues and need three male cheerleaders to brighten your day – in a non-gay way, that is. Developed by the maker of *Gitaroo Man*, this is the funniest, most addictive rhythm-action game on DS. Let's Cheer.

### WORLD OF WARCRAFT

With millions of subscribers worldwide, *WOW* has become the most successful MMORPG ever – even bigger than *EverQuest*. Many have tried to emulate its success, but currently *WOW* has too big a piece of the pie for others to muscle in.

THESE TITLES COULD BE APPEARING IN OUR LISTS IN THE NOT-TOO-DISTANT FUTURE

## ASSASSIN'S CREED

Format: PlayStation3, Xbox 360, PC Publisher: Ubisoft Developer: In-House

The trend toward completely realistic, open-world gaming will be taken one step closer to perfection if *Assassin's Creed* plays as well as it reads on paper. PlayStation3 may not have the gadgetry of Nintendo Wii, but the beef inside Sony's third home console has been harnessed by Ubisoft to give your character free roam of the city. Plus, the crowds of people have the kind of AI response you'd expect at a Millwall game. Is it even worth mentioning that the graphics are stonking too?



# PERIPHERALS

**EACH CONSOLE HAS THOSE MUST-HAVE PERIPHERALS – CAN YOU KEEP YOUR HANDS OFF THEM?**



## CREATIVE FATAL1TY PROFESSIONAL LASER MOUSE

**Console:** PC
**From:** Creative
**Price:** £34.99 (TBC)
**Available:** Now

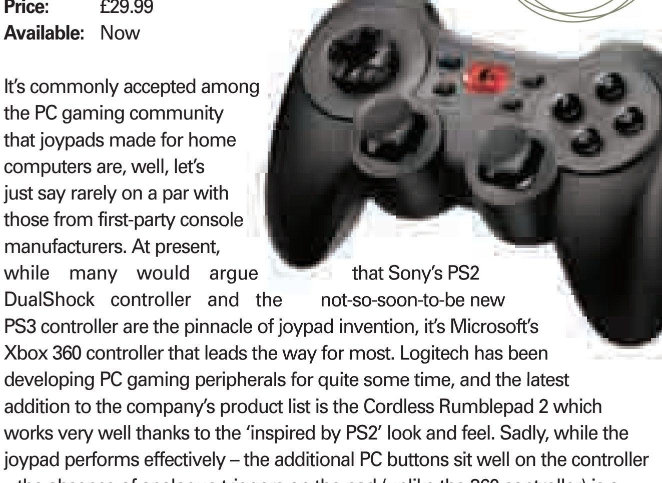
PC gaming peripherals are, sadly, more often than not a huge disappointment. A gimmick that occasionally comes endorsed by a name from within the industry, that is supposed to reassure potential buyers of its quality, but rarely does. It's refreshing, then, to learn that uber-professional gamer Jonathan 'Fatal1ty' Wendel (interviewed back on page 82) was instrumental in the design of the new mouse from Creative (also available as Optical) from the ground up and, as a result, has created an impressive mouse that feels comfortable while helping to ensure you're given every advantage in the gaming arena. It comes equipped with a custom G-weight modular system (five interchangeable weights from 3.5 to 26 grams), a Rapid-Res One-Click Hardware cpi resolution, a 2400cpi HD-Optix laser engine with 6.4 megapixel sensors that run at 7,080 frames per second, it also packs an additional chassis and build features. A great mouse, but it will never help you against Fatal1ty himself.



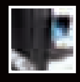
## LOGITECH CORDLESS RUMBLEPAD 2

LOOK, NO WIRES

**Console:** PC
**From:** Logitech
**Price:** £29.99
**Available:** Now



It's commonly accepted among the PC gaming community that joypads made for home computers are, well, let's just say rarely on a par with those from first-party console manufacturers. At present, while many would argue that Sony's PS2 DualShock controller and the not-so-soon-to-be new PS3 controller are the pinnacle of joypad invention, it's Microsoft's Xbox 360 controller that leads the way for most. Logitech has been developing PC gaming peripherals for quite some time, and the latest addition to the company's product list is the Cordless Rumblepad 2 which works very well thanks to the 'inspired by PS2' look and feel. Sadly, while the joypad performs effectively – the additional PC buttons sit well on the controller – the absence of analogue triggers on the pad (unlike the 360 controller) is a disappointment, especially to those looking for a pad for use with racing games. Happily, this really is the only fault, but we hope Logitech tackles this obvious mistake with the Rumblepad 3.



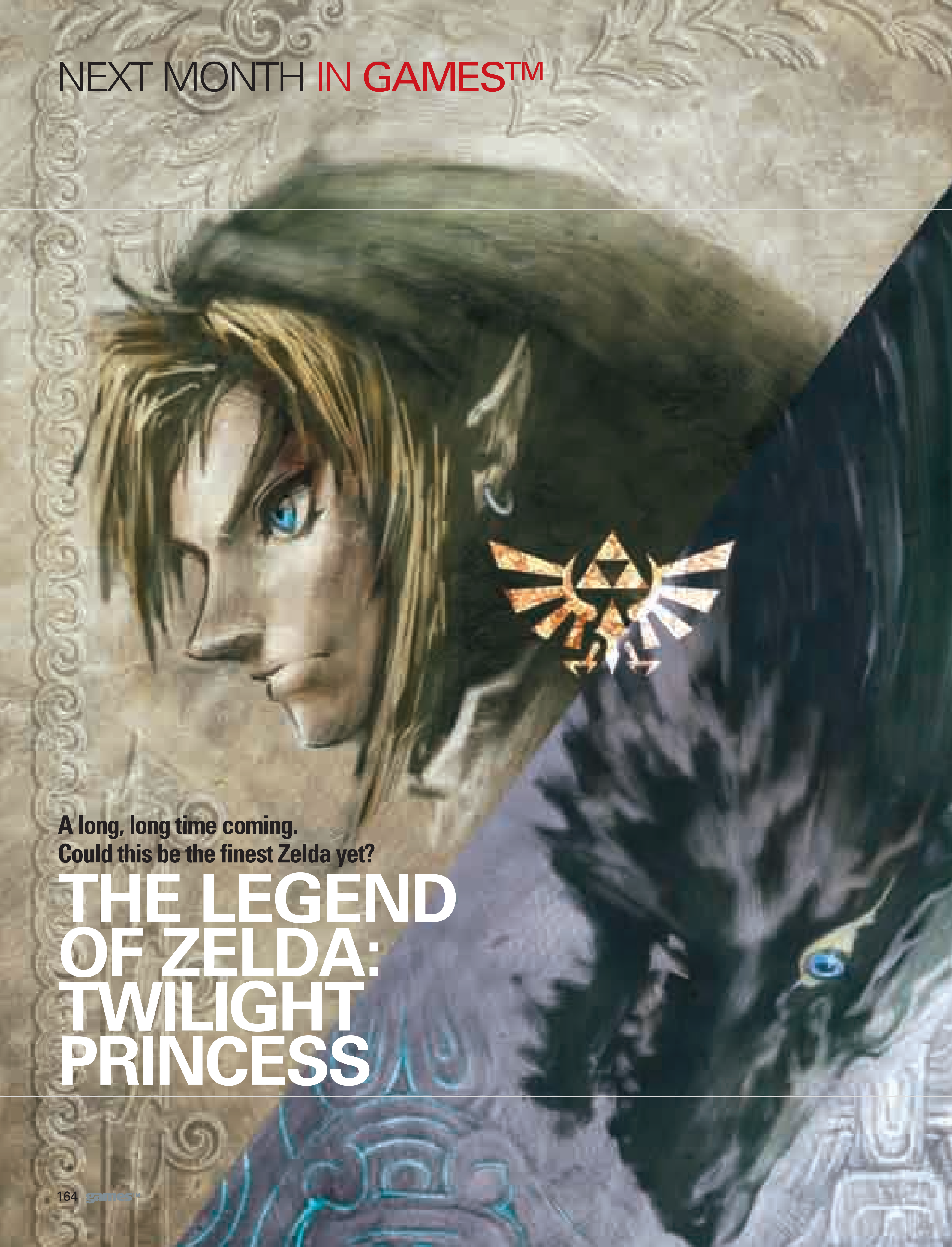
## LOGITECH G25 RACING WHEEL

**Console:** PC
**From:** Logitech
**Price:** £199
**Available:** Now



This is it. This is *the* racing wheel we've been waiting seemingly decades for. We vehemently believe that there's nothing worse than using a poorly engineered steering wheel set up, especially at the price many used to retail for. However, the G25 sets the record straight in sublime fashion. Heavy to remove from the box, its weight and feel ooze quality – from its stainless steel build to its leather coating this kit mirrors the parts from a race car cockpit closer than any other. Easy to mount onto a desk or table, the G25 features a six-speed shifter and clutch pedal – found to the left of the brake and accelerator pedals – plus two-motor force feedback. The second motor provides more realistic directional forces that have specific sensations of impact with walls, structures and other cars as well as blown tyres and banks in the road. We tested the G25 out on *GTR 2* during our review of the game last issue and, well, we were very reluctant to send the wheel back to Logitech, but sadly we signed documents to ensure its safe and swift return. If you love your serious racing games and have the money to spare, we thoroughly recommend the G25 Racing Wheel, you won't be disappointed.


eMag

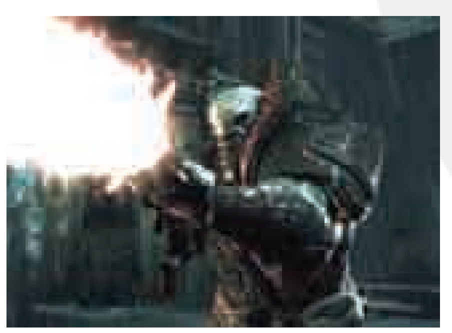


A long, long time coming. Could this be the finest Zelda yet?

# THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: TWILIGHT PRINCESS




# NEXT MONTH



Look at his face. This is the face of something that needs shooting… pronto.

## MORE… REVIEWS

We're knee-deep in the middle of autumn's traditional gaming glut, and what a review section we have lined up next month. Not only will we be delivering the much anticipated verdict on the magnificent looking *Gears Of* War, but also the Wii launch line up will be ready to go. That means *Zelda*. And *Gears*. In one issue. Oh yes…

***"GEARS OF WAR WILL BE SITTING ON TOP OF A VERY PROMISING PILE"***



We just can't help it, we still adore this plump little plumber.

## MORE… PREVIEWS

With the unfortunate PlayStation3 delay in European territories, there's now plenty of time to delve even deeper with the forecast launch titles, but it's the second batch of Wii software that is going to monopolise the majority of our time next month. *Super Mario Galaxy*, *WarioWare: Smooth Moves*… they can't some soon enough.

***"EXPECT MULTI-PLAYER EMBARRASSMENT IN NINTENDO'S NEW WARIOWARE"***



Little known fact: this man shares a name with someone on the **games**™ team.

## MORE… FEATURES

You can look forward to another feature-heavy issue next month, with an in-depth look at videogame artificial intelligence being the highlight of our insightful articles. We'll also be sitting down with Mr Deus Ex himself, Warren Spector, and thrashing out the past, present and future of the videogaming universe. Do yourself a huge favour and don't miss issue 51.

# ON SALE 30 NOV '06

# CONTACT

## ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF gamesTM

**Enough of what we think – now you get to show off your rapier wit to praise, criticise or mock the game industry. Or not…**

**I NEVER PLAYED** *Grand Theft Auto.* Yes, I know, but my limit is pretty much *Panzer General 3D* – there, I said it – and when reading your *Crackdown* review and your quest to find a catchier acronym for sandbox games, I thought of 'Free To Roam' or FTR. Just an idea. It came to me while sitting on the bog. I've just rushed out to send it to you. Bet you're glad I'm emailing this, rather than putting pen to paper.
**Mark Mullins**

**games™:** In all honesty we don't care if you send it by carrier pigeon, so long as you keep them coming. We like your suggestion, Mark, but to keep this democratic we'd like to see a few more ideas first. That, dear readers, is a challenge. Send in your suggestions and together we can make a difference

**PLEASE TRY AND** buck the trend for writing every feature/preview/review as a faux collective. This conceit is very tiresome. What is wrong with an individual POV? It makes for a more believable, substantial read than this fake group analysis nonsense of 'we' believe this, and 'we' believe that.
**Mike**

**games™:** We accept that not everyone will take to the hive mind approach, but it was a decision taken very early on in the gestation of the magazine and, like it or not, it's as much a part of our identity as anything else. We understand that there are a few downsides, but there are also plenty of upsides. On both the business and consumer fronts, the game industry is a highly competitive and, more importantly, opinionated industry – we're sure you've witnessed the groundless prejudice regarding certain games and scores that regularly surfaces on forums. With or without the names, the score and content will not change, and the team will always answer all serious queries and problems. As long as granting a game a six rather than an eight can raise such huge volumes of vitriol, there will always be a justification for the collective approach. It's a matter of solidarity.

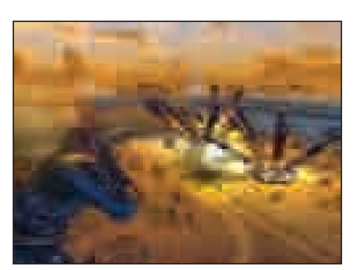
**I'D LIKE TO** point out how disappointed I am with Sony. As a PSP owner, I always feel unloved by the electronics giant. Not only does it raise two fingers to the European market with the delay of PS3, but it never seems to have a decent strategy for the release of games on the PSP format.

*Lego Star Wars II* on the system was supposed to rival the PS2 and Xbox offerings, but upon arriving at Game to purchase a copy I suddenly find myself having wasted my time. The game is out on PC, 360, PS2, Xbox, and even with sub-standard versions on DS and GBA. I'm gutted. Why the hell does Sony do this? Same thing happened with *GTA: Liberty City Stories* and *Star Wars Battlefront II*.

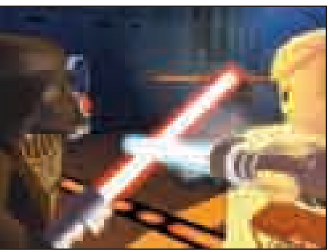
If it is to release a game for PSP on a given date, it should follow through with it. Unjustified delays generate a faithless customer base. Come on, Sony, pull it together.
**Stu Nimmo**

**games™:** A valid but wildly misplaced criticism. Sony does not actually control the release dates of the games you mention. The publisher controls the release date, and while Sony does

> **"IS CLASSIFICATION JUSTIFIED** ENOUGH TO CHARGE US FOR THE PLEASURE OF **STIFLING OUR CREATIVE EXPRESSION?** CERTAIN GAMES ARE NOT SUITED TO SOME AUDIENCES, BUT **AGE RESTRICTIONS** SERVE ONLY TO **ENTICE YOUNGER GAMERS"**



Will sandbox be known as 'Free To Roam' from now on? Answers on a postcard…



Delays to the PSP release of *Lego Star Wars II* have upset one loyal Sony customer.

## Making Contact

There are many wonderful ways to get in touch with games™. The traditional postal method is perfectly acceptable using the address below:

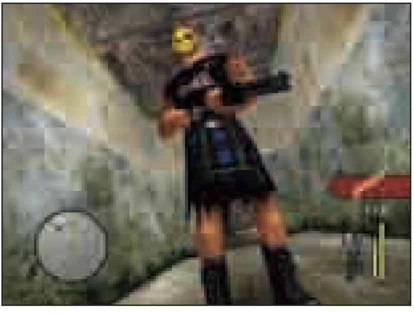
games™, Imagine Publishing Ltd, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset BH2 6EZ

However, there are quicker ways to reach us thanks to the technological marvel that is the Internet. Email us at this address:
**gamestm@imagine-publishing.co.uk**





*Condemned* scared the wits out of a 32-year-old man; a fact that he is happy to admit…



…although he seems happy for a child to have unfettered access to the brutality of *Manhunt*.

publish games, it doesn't publish those on your list. *Lego Star Wars* is Activision, as is *Battlefront*, while *GTA* is of course Rockstar. Sony's neglect of its customer base, particularly in Europe, is strongly felt at the moment, with the delayed PS3 making things considerably worse. However, we must be careful not to victimise a company based on one mistake. It is still a force to be reckoned with.

**I HOWLED WITH** laughter reading your article entitled 'Bloody Minded'. I particularly enjoyed your comments supporting the BBFC and welcoming its support of the medium. Of course the BBFC is going to support the medium, it's a blank cheque for them. When you read the classification guidelines and pricing structure, you'll see that not only is the criteria for a classification vague, but also the pricing structure is open-ended. They can charge what they like.

Where is the proof that classification is even justified, let alone justified enough to charge us for the pleasure of stifling our creative expression? I want to point out that certain games are clearly not suited to some audiences, but that age restrictions serve only to entice younger gamers. All consumers need is clear content labelling. The best judge of suitability is always the individual. Don't let those in power tell you otherwise. I'm 32 and *Condemned* scares the bejesus out of me. I'll only play it during the day, while I'm sure there are under 18s out there who find it tame. Classification is a welcomed evil to publishers since it relieves them of responsibility, but please, as a magazine publisher who has no similar restrictions put upon your creative expression, do not pretend we have anything to be thankful for from the BBFC.

**Victor Throe**

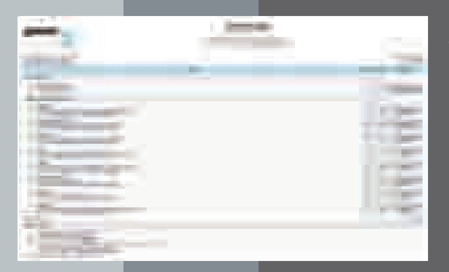
**games™:** What you have presented, Victor, is simply your opinion. The debate on censorship has raged for centuries and, we don't pretend to have the answer. Nobody should. Your claims of classification stifling creative expression seem a bit dramatic; videogames are riddled with contentious subject matter, the vast majority of which is left uncut, and it could be argued that the medium isn't sophisticated enough in terms of exploring ideas to justify the inclusion of anything more severe. We shudder at the thought of a videogame tackling, say, paedophilia when it can barely handle mechanised war in a mature fashion.

That the BBFC profits from the process is dubious, but we're certain that most publishers can afford it. You call for 'clear labelling', and yet a classification system is little more than that. It's long been understood that parents will buy or rent films for which their children are under age based on

# CONTACT

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# FROM THE FORUM

## ARE WE PAYING TOO MUCH FOR NEXT-GEN GAMES?

**SlackMaster**
Okay, owning a 360 myself and being pretty pissed about the RRP of most games (£49.99), then hearing of the potential £49.99-£79.99 for some PS3 titles, I was thinking to myself 'when are games just not worth the asking price'? I know that in the past some of you – including myself – may have paid silly money for some games – take *SFII* and the like – but when do games get to a price you simply can't justify spending on them?

**ScotsWahey**
For the crap they're releasing right now the answer is yes, we are paying too much. Or rather you are paying too much. I'm not going to get a next-gen machine until I see some decent titles. My PS2 collection still isn't complete yet.

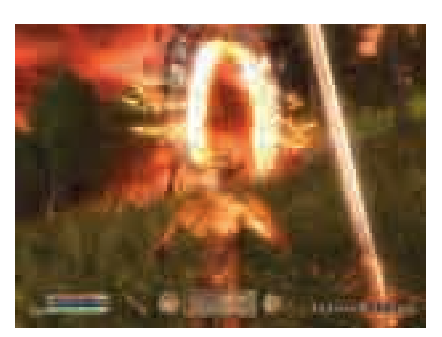
**Magius**
It depends entirely on the game at hand. Take *Oblivion* for example. For your £50, you get a massive, sprawling world packed with hundreds upon hundreds of things to do, beautiful visuals, an absorbing story line, a character that is unique to you, continued improvements, quests and other downloads, and so on. Well worth the £50 asking price. Unfortunately, there are far too many games with a £45-50 price tag that are nothing more than 'just another update'. How they can justify that price tag on say *FIFA* or *Burnout Revenge* is beyond me. There are many other examples but those two – and EA – spring immediately to mind.

**Biohazard**
No, I don't believe we are. If the games are taking companies more time and money to make then the game prices have to rise. I think that the high street shops are in the wrong; most 360 games are £49.99 in Game, £10 more than online prices.

**Somerset Bumpkin**
I think £50 isn't a bad price for a *big* game. I paid £60 for a SNES game a decade ago, and inflation has been a hundred per cent over the last ten years so it should be more like £120. These days, we're all too used to cheap electronics. We're spoilt and greedy, and too lazy to shop around. People want every game that's out there, whereas back in the day I bought maybe 12 games for my NES throughout its whole life. The cost back then was production; now its development. £15 for a two-hour film or £50 for 80+ hours on *Oblivion*? I'll pay it if it's worth it. It's too much money to take a chance on, which is probably why your *killer7*s don't do quite as well. *Gears Of War* for £70 – if it's as good as I hope it is, it's a *bargain*.



It would have got a nine, okay? Now, let's just call that an end to the whole sorry thing.



The price of next-generation gaming is fine for a monster like *Oblivion*, but not for the majority of titles.

whatever they deem suitable. The individual is still the judge, only that individual is the parent, not the child. We fail to see justification for putting the decision to buy a game like *Manhunt* into the hands of a 10 year old. A rating system ensures that doesn't happen. That you find *Condemned* scarier than someone under 18 lends no credence to your view. We would argue that the highest rating should be 16, but that's for another issue…

**IT WAS MOST** refreshing to see the admission of your mistake not to review *Half-Life 2*. The original episode left a sour taste in readers' mouths and it was these readers who lost out as most of us value **games™**'s trustworthy reviews above other magazines and websites (except for that one occasion when common sense flew out the window).

The *Half-Life* cover on issue 48, along with an excellent feature and (finally) *Half-Life 2* review score on page 178 have gone a long way toward making up for the mistake. It was always in the readers' best interests to patch things up, and I applaud you for this. Better late than never. Now's a good time to put the saga behind us, move on, and look forward to some excellent coverage of Valve's future output including *Episode 2* and the next-gen versions of the *Half-Life 2* family. I think we all come out of this as winners so, once again, well done, guys.
**Mapster**

**games™:** Thanks Mapster, we only wish your sentiments were shared. That was a position we put ourselves in, so we can hardly complain, but it seems we're damned if we do and damned if we don't. Believe it or not, those who've criticised the mistake for the last year and a half – the ones who motivated our decision to clear the air in the first place – were the very people who chastised us for being so arrogant as to think anyone would care what we thought of *Half-Life 2*. Baffling. Still, we're happy to correct a mistake that was made when many of the team weren't even on the magazine. As you rightly say: time to move on.

**"THE EXCELLENT HALF-LIFE FEATURE AND (FINALLY) HALF-LIFE 2 REVIEW SCORE IN ISSUE 48 HAVE GONE A LONG WAY TOWARD MAKING UP FOR NOT REVIEWING THE GAME ORIGINALLY"**



…AND COUNTING

